

CHRISTIAN COURIER

April 16, 2007

A Reformed Biweekly

No. 2813 \$2.00



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61st year of publication

Happy 50th birthday EU

Harry der Nederlanden

We're admittedly a bit late in joining the celebrations marking the 50th anniversary of the European Union, but even in Europe it was hardly celebrated like Canadians celebrate the 1st and Americans the 4th of July. Nevertheless, it is a singular historical achievement that deserves attention.

Many of us will recall its humble beginnings, first in the association called Benelux and then in the common market or European Economic Community, which in 1957 added France, West Germany and Italy to the original threesome of Belgium, The Netherlands and Luxembourg. Today the EU includes 27 countries, and more are on the waiting list.

Whatever its shortcomings, the EU must be recognized as a huge achievement, for it not only established a stable peace among countries that have long been intense rivals and even enemies but it has also merged their economies and parts of their governing bodies.

The Eurocrats in Brussels (of whom there are many) celebrated the Union's successes, of course, but for most citizens of member states, the largely faceless bureaucracy is not closely bound up with their identity. It does not conjure up the same warmth and loyalty as nationalism once did.

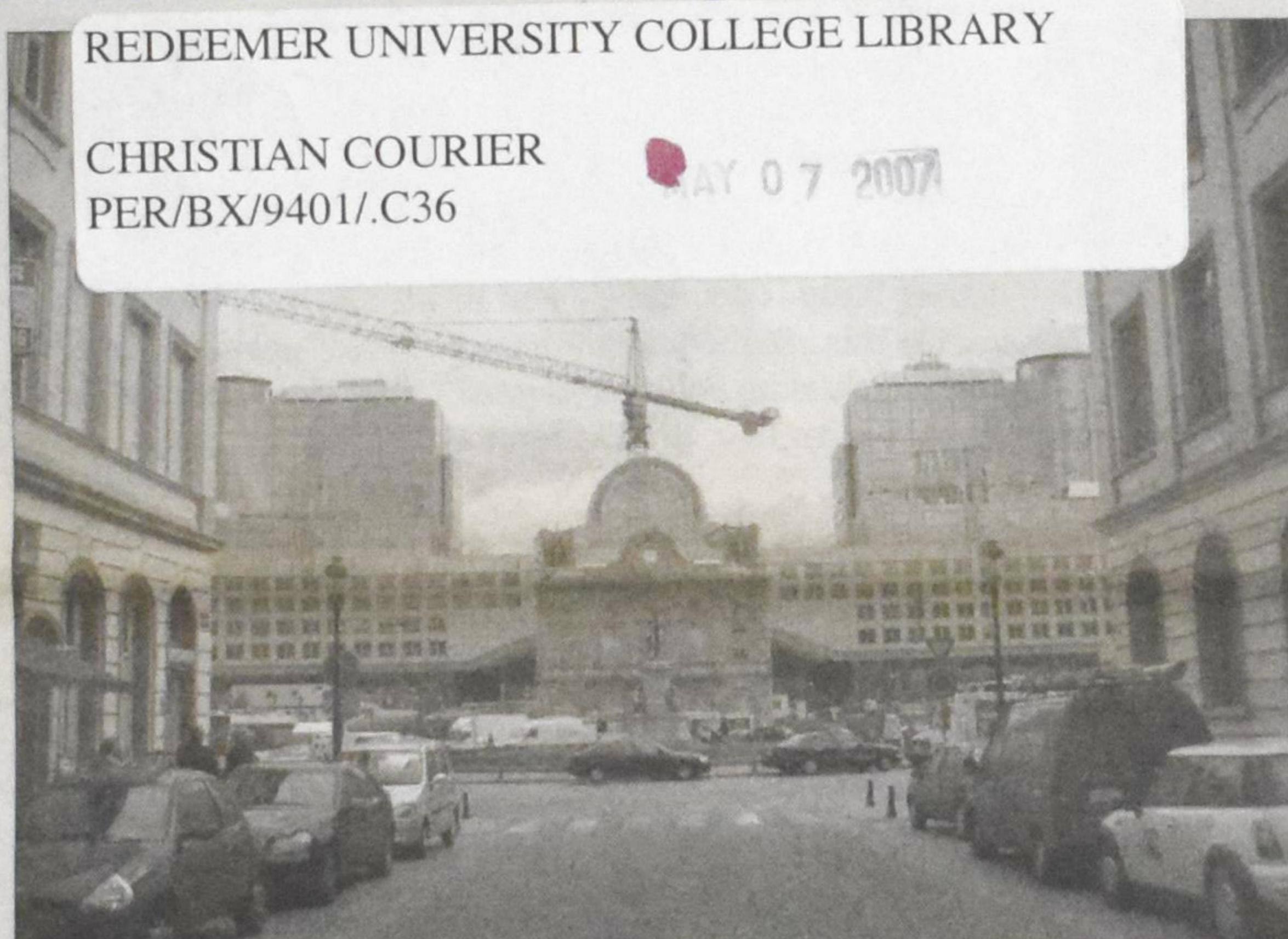
Alan Stred, author of *The Decline and Fall of the Habsburg Empire*, called the EU birthday party "bizarre and contrived." The government-sponsored celebrations, he felt, only highlighted public apathy.

"Todays EU," he said, "resembles a sort of undemocratic Habsburg Empire. Its legislation is proposed by a commission of unelected bureaucrats who have now apparently lost control of their own staffs and who themselves

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are usually political outcasts from their national political systems. Decisions on whether to adopt their often bizarre initiatives are then taken in total secrecy by the Council of Ministers or the European Council, before being rubber-stamped by the federalist parliament and imposed on the citizens of member states, whose national legislatures can do absolutely nothing to alter their directives or regulations."

As John O'Sullivan of the *National Review* put it, "Everybody loves the EU except the people." And the EU now embraces almost 500 million people. According to recent polls, 44 percent of those people believe life has actually gotten worse under the EU, and only about half of them think it is a good thing. Not that there are strong movements afoot to withdraw. Most people are ambivalent about membership, it seems, accepting it only because the alternative – not being a member – might be worse. Most simply take the Union for granted.

The American midwest is experiencing its first boom since the 1970s when farmers benefited from the huge demand for their grain and corn in the USSR. Since then making a decent living has been a struggle for most farmers. Because of the problems in the Middle East, however, the Bush administration decided it was important for the country to reduce its dependence on Mideast oil. The U.S. has to import about 60 percent of its oil. To cut down on oil use, it set a goal of replacing 20 percent of the gasoline used in the country with biofuels over the next ten years. Ethanol can be made from sugar cane, switch grass or corn. Since the U.S. is the world's biggest corn producer, corn was the natural choice for converting into ethanol.

The U.S. government has been pouring billions of dollars in subsidies into building refineries all across the midwest capable of turning corn into oil. Farmers are excited because

WTO chief Pascal Lainy wrote in the Financial Times: "Europe today lacks the necessary political energy. Public opinion is skeptical, political elites are fatigued."

In 2005 both the Dutch and the French turned down the 500-page constitution that was to have been the crowning achievement. The negative vote was a great shock to Eu leaders, but was interpreted primarily as a protest against further expansion.

Timothy Garton Ash,

a prominent student of things European, argues that the reality is better than the popular perception. Citizens fail to appreciate what they have gained by membership. In his own online poll, Ash discovered that Europeans, too, place a high value on freedom, but they do not associate the EU with the achievement of freedom. They are much more likely to associate it with overregulation by a distant bureaucracy over which they have little say-so.

However, Jose Manuel Barroso, the current president of the EU, in his speech marking the occasion, celebrated the values of freedom and solidarity as central to the

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Ethanol: future promise or future problem

the demand for corn has pushed prices up, and for the first time in about three decades they are beginning to make a good income – if you're a corn grower, that is.

The booming corn market has been transforming farm country, creating a boom in farming towns, especially in those where ethanol plants are being located, and it is also pushing land prices up in states like Iowa and Nebraska and anywhere corn grow easily. Canada, with its shorter growing season, produces relatively little corn; in fact, it is a net importer of corn from the U.S. However, those who grow other grain crops or soybeans may benefit too, for with corn bringing such a high price land in the Midwest



formerly devoted to growing anything else will likely be switched to corn. That will cause a shortage of crops like soybeans and push their prices up as well. So the hike in corn prices and the increase in acreage devoted to corn will probably push up prices across the board.

That's not good news for all farmers – not for those who have to pay higher prices for corn to feed their livestock. Hog farmers, for example, say that the cost of feed-

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News

How Iran's true believers pass the torch

Hardline conservatives share the core values of the Islamic Republic from father to son through the celebration of sacrifice and martyrdom.

Scott Peterson

AHVAZ AND DEZFUL, IRAN
Mohamad Reza Rashidi's devotion is measured by the plastic water bottle he brings to the cemetery every few days to wash the dusty gravestone of his favorite martyr.

The young student was not even born when Iran's devastating 1980-88 war with Iraq ended, leaving one million dead and wounded. But the core values of its 1979 Islamic revolution, such as sacrifice and martyrdom, burn inside him as they do in so many of his peers.

"[Veterans] didn't go to war with arms ... they defeated the enemy with their beliefs," says Rashidi, who aims to become a "soldier of Imam Mahdi" – the hidden imam whom Shiites expect to return someday to bring justice.

"It could be a message to tell the US that we are not afraid of them," he adds, standing in the expansive Ahvaz war cemetery amid a sea of flapping Iranian flags. "If we were scared, there would not be so many martyrs."

Such words may sound like the rehearsed platitudes of flag-burning anti-US rallies in Tehran. But the voices coming from this area near Iran's border with Iraq, which bore the brunt of the fighting against Iraq two decades ago, speak of revolutionary ideals still deeply held. Hardline conservatives committed to these ideals typically rely on 20 percent of votes in Iran, analysts say – and much more in times of national crisis.

It is they who are passing the ideological torch of the Islamic Republic from father to son. At a time when tensions are running high with Iran with speculation about US military action over Iran's



Friendly Iranian

nuclear program, these true believers say they are ready, again, to sacrifice their lives to preserve Islamic rule.

"Those who believe will still fight to their last breath," says Haji Ahmad Palash, who lost a son and brother to the war. Another son and brother were disabled; yet another brother spent 10 years as a POW in Iraq.

"If a war happens now, we are nine brothers – minus one – and we will still go to war," he vows. "My whole family is ready."

Such devotion is not universal in Iran, where the uncompromising views of stalwart revolutionaries – President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad among them – collide with reform-leaning liberals who prefer Western-style civil society. That group often sent their children out of Iran in the 1980s – an act seen as sacrilege by those who gave up families to fight Iraq.

The division, manifested at times in violent street clashes, has shaped Iran's tug-of-war politics since the first landslide victory of reform-minded President Mohammad Khatami in 1997. And it has made passing on the ideological torch even more of a priority for the right wing, especially at a time when Iran is trying to bolster itself as a regional power.

"Iranian society is divided into three groups: the Hizbullahi believers, those in the middle, and those who don't believe in and protest against the system because of small problems," says an intelligence officer in Ahvaz who volunteered for the war effort at age 11, and could not be named. "If there is a war [against the US], the believers will fight, and many in the middle and some in the third group will join them."

Such beliefs are particularly potent at this time of year, as Iranians celebrate their New Year, and students and families take organized trips, steeped in ideology and patriotism to the former front lines, called "Rahian-e Nour," or "Followers of the Light Path." Pilgrims climb on old tanks and hear of miracles, sacrifice, the power of prayer and selflessness – all of which aim to reinforce commitment to Iran's Islamic system.

At the battlefields, witnesses say that some people fill small plastic bags with front-line soil as a reminder of their journey to the root of "sacred defense." Officials say 600,000 Iranians visited last year; the



Tehran skyline against mountains

figure this year is up 20 percent.

"The graves of unknown soldiers in many countries are symbols of national pride and love of country," says Hamidreza Taraghi, an influential conservative and former lawmaker in Tehran. "The difference in our war zones is that patriotism has been linked to the religious beliefs of the warriors. What they saw during the war – the assistance of God to them – forms the basis of their beliefs."

High among those is adoration of Hussein, the third Shiite imam whose force was far outnumbered in Karbala, in modern Iraq, in AD 680. Hussein's martyrdom created a model of divine sacrifice used to energize legions of Iranian troops who often attacked in waves.

"They transformed those war zones into a national and religious sacred place," says Mr. Taraghi. Visitors today "are the same young people that would support the country if it goes to another war. It's very nice to see [them] praying on that soil, kissing that earth that has been wet by the blood of those soldiers."

Behind those front lines, 45 miles from the border, the cities of Ahvaz and Dezful claim stature as two that have produced hosts of martyrs – and those willing to follow in their footsteps.

In Ahvaz cemetery, banners carry portraits of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, leader of the revolution and wartime chief, and Iran's current supreme religious leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. One banner reads: "Hussein is my guiding light, and the ark of my salvation." Another: "Martyrdom is the art of the men of God."

Some graves appear never to have been washed. Others receive constant care, like the dark slab for Sayed Ali Akbar Fatemehzadeh, who "attained the holy rank of martyrdom" at 17, according to the inscription.

"He was a great man, the nation owes him ... because if martyrs were not here, we would not have Iran," says Ali Akbar Khoshnazar, named after the martyr, a friend of his father.

Ali Akbar, who is 18, came here alone, poured water over the stone, and prayed. "When I come here, my soul relaxes," says Mr. Khoshnazar, an electronics graduate who wears a silver religious bracelet. "My father says he was a spiritual person."

Indeed, the young martyr played a key role in the life of Khoshnazar's father, Gholamreza Khoshnazar. Early in the war, the father was 16 when he saw a 12-year-old guard with a heavy machine gun in his street. Uncomfortable that a boy was "guarding" him, he signed up for the volunteer Basiji force at the mosque.

The father and his friend Ali Akbar fought and studied in turns, and then were together in one offensive battle. Ali Akbar's unit left 30 minutes before Gholamreza's. "He was hit with a rocket and half his face was gone – that was a severe shock to me, because we really liked each other," recalls Gholamreza, a print-shop owner whose fist-length beard exhibits a plug of gray. "Then I promised God: If I was given a son, I would name him Ali Akbar."

Gholamreza survived, despite wounds that have left him widely scarred, and at one point "5 percent from death," he says.

"Our generation, we ... would go back to the war as soon as we could walk," he says. "When we were on the front, we would wake in the night, do our ablutions, and pray. The only thing we would ask of God was for the health of Imam Khomeini and the return of Imam Mahdi. It was a very holy spirit in those days."

But the price was high. Gholamreza flips through a worn photo album, damaged by water when he threw it into a river during a fit of trauma a couple years ago. The book – and his own sanity, Gholamreza admits – were saved by son Ali Akbar.

"Some of my friends here have become martyrs," says Gholamreza, pointing at snapshots of comrades riding on tanks, and in trenches, shooting their weapons.

Gholamreza pauses reverently over a picture of Ayatollah Khomeini, given to his family during the war. And then a coin, stuck to the page with tape, that depicts the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, presented by a commander, who said it had come directly "from the Imam [Khomeini]."

"For me, a follower of Imam Khomeini ... it was my duty to be a martyr, to defend my country against people who wanted to destroy civilization," says Gholamreza. Then, he "was not so knowledgeable about martyrdom, and didn't know what a delicious fruit it is; it slipped from my grasp."

"But today, I would like to do the right thing ... and return to God," says Gholamreza. "I told my son what a good friend I have had [in martyr Ali Akbar], and naturally this love has been passed to my son, so he goes to the martyr and tells him his problems."

In a view widely shared here, Gholamreza says that Iran was able to repel Iraq and the "imperialistic powers [that] attacked us" – a reference to US and European support for Saddam Hussein – and will do so again if necessary.

"Muslims think this way: Our body is not ours, but God has lent it to us and he can take it whenever he wants," says Haji Khezeir Bavi, a veteran, as he prepared to board a bus to work as a "Rahian-e Nour" volunteer. "Why not satisfy God and die for a good cause?"

That thinking drove countless men to the front lines, says Mr. Bavi, who worked at the cemetery in Ahvaz for 12 years. After a burial, fellow fighters would say: "Keep a space for us, next to this one. We will be martyrs," recalls Bavi. "And one month later, their bodies would come."

The younger generation will be just as committed to battle today, says veteran Abdulrahman Esivand. "If our leader Ayatollah Khamenei calls for battle, you would still see 12-year-olds marching to war."

Scott Peterson is a staff writer of The Christian Science Monitor

News

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ing their animals has risen by about 40 percent during the boom – and pork prices haven't risen proportionately, so their profit margins are being cut. To push the price of pork up to a sustainable level, Iowa State University said, hog farmers would have to cut back pork production by as much as 15 percent.

So while the subsidies have created optimism among the corn growers, it has caused anxiety for other farmers.

Another group heavily impacted by the boom is young farmers who are in the process of acquiring farms. In corn country, land that was selling for \$4,500 a year ago is now selling for \$6,000 an acre. Higher in prime corn-growing country. Average land values in Iowa and Nebraska have risen by 13 and 14 percent over the past year.

These land prices are making it near impossible for an aspiring young farmer to get his own farm unless he inherits it. Yet, it is very important that a next generation be able to take over. Because life on the farm has been rough for the last thirty years, most farm kids have opted to make a life and career for themselves in the city. The farmer population has been

aging and rural towns shrinking. According to a survey taken five years ago, about half of U.S. farms are now owned by people over the age of 65 and one-quarter by people over 75. (Admittedly, this may include a lot of marginal or part-time farmers. I'm not sure who was and who was not included in these statistics.)

Will the high land prices radically alter who is able to farm? Will ethanol corn end up further undermining the family farm in America and ultimately hurt farming towns?

What will happen to those who pay the high prices for land to begin farming and the boom becomes bust? That's hardly likely, say the boosters, for America's and the world's need for energy will only keep rising.

True, but many critics have pointed out again and again that to make ethanol from corn is a very expensive and very energy intensive process. It is only feasible at present because American taxpayers are pouring over \$5 billion a year in subsidies into the project. How long will they be willing to do that? If it results in them having to pay much higher prices for food, not just for pork and beef but for milk, eggs and hundreds of other products that con-

tain corn products, will it continue to look like a good idea? In addition, as corn prices rise, subsidies, too, have to rise to make ethanol conversion feasible.

This does not even touch on the effect of higher food prices on poor countries in the developing world because America, one of the world's largest breadbaskets, is growing biofuel for cars instead of food to feed hungry people. The impact has already been felt in Latin America, where corn is a basic staple used in making tortillas. Rising corn prices have already sparked protests among the poor in some countries. It is an ethical issue that is bound to become a political one in the near future.

But simply looking at the entire gargantuan project from a practical point of view, it looks foolish to many. For ethanol can much more efficiently be produced from sugar cane. Sugar cane grows faster and yields far more energy. The same is true of certain grasses and even wood, although the technology for producing ethanol with enzymes from the latter is still in developmental stages. Nevertheless, it doesn't just look conceivable but highly likely that other crops will eventually supplant corn as

a better source of ethanol. If that happens, what impact will that have on an American Midwest that has bought whole hog into the corn ethanol future?

Canada's ethanol industry

Since Canada is not a huge corn producer, the ethanol boom has not affected farmers as much as south of the border. Only Ontario and Quebec are large corn producers.

But the government of Canada has also jumped aboard the ethanol bandwagon as part of its plan to address climate change. Ethanol produces far less CO₂ (the greenhouse gas deemed responsible for global warming) than regular gasoline. By the year 2010, 35 percent of the gasoline used in Canada is supposed to contain 10 percent ethanol.

There are now at least eight ethanol refineries in operation in Canada, compared to about 120 in the U.S. (with scores more under construction). Most are in Ontario and Quebec, but the western provinces are also getting in on the act. Their ethanol plants will be producing ethanol from other grains. Like in the U.S., the industry is heavily driven by government subsidies and loans.

Happy 50th birthday EU continued from page 1

heritage of the EU. He grew up in Portugal, and he points out that when he was 18 years old, his country was still ruled by a dictatorship. The same was true of Spain and Greece. Becoming part of the EU family, therefore, probably means more to people like him than to the Dutch or the French.

"Today, in this great and open Europe," he declared, "citizens are free to believe and say what they think, to live and travel where they want."

Many commentators credit the Union with turning Europe into an economic powerhouse and bringing not just political stability but also prosperity to the member states. That certainly seems to be the case in recent times. Those countries that have joined the Union most recently, mostly eastern European countries that were formerly Soviet satellites, are enjoying unprecedented economic growth. In spite of gripes from older members that the newcomers are taking away jobs, the rest of the EU also seems to be enjoying something of an economic revival.

Critics of the EU and of its highly regulated economy and welfare system point out that prosperity came to Europe well ahead of the creation of the EU and that for a long time the economy of Europe languished, suffering from high unemployment and an inability to adjust to new global realities.

Along with better health care, longer life expectancy, a great degree of economic stability and a respect for equality and human rights, the EU has also brought a huge bureaucratic structure. Certain entitlements and subsidies have become so enshrined that it has become very difficult to introduce necessary changes. Agricultural subsidies, for instance, eat up some 40 percent of the EU budget. When reductions in entitlements are proposed (or, as in France, changes in employment law) those affected take to the streets, business grinds to a halt, the police stand by, there is panic in the upper echelons, and the politicians cave in to pressure. A distant bureaucracy often seems to give rise either to indifference or to street politics.

To mark the 50th anniversary, EU leaders drew

up the Berlin Declaration, announced as a road map into the future. It was seen as an attempt by the EU leaders to move beyond the impasse created by the 2005 rejection of the new Constitution by the Dutch and the French. The politicians are looking for an idea to galvanize the public, admitting that the EU has become too abstract and complex to arouse popular enthusiasm. An attempt has been made to make the fight against global warming the common cause that will mobilize Europeans and unify them. However, few of the EU states have been able to meet their Kyoto targets, so to many it once again seems like so much rhetoric that may not necessarily mean concrete action.

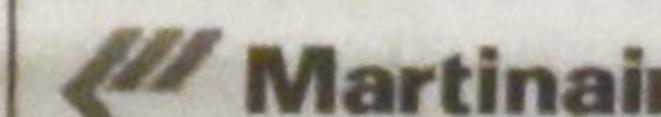
Anne Applebaum, a conservative commentator, points out that the Berlin Declaration presents Europe as "an Idea, a hope for freedom and understanding." The EU, she contends, may be a lot of things – a free trade zone, a common currency, common regulations – but it lacks a common Idea or a sense of a shared destiny.

She joins critics like Pope Benedict in suggesting that in jettisoning its past, and refusing to acknowledge its Judeo-Christian heritage, the EU has invited an identity crisis. Without roots in the past, the EU is unable to project a vision for the future.

Jim Skillen of the Center for Public Justice concedes, "Yes, most of Europe is now highly secularized, birth rates are too low, and few of its countries are dealing successfully with the growing number of immigrants, particularly Muslim immigrants."

However, he goes on to say, in spite of all its shortcomings, the EU deserves to be celebrated as "a highly important institutional example of how to build habits of cooperation among peoples and states that had for centuries been warring antagonists."

"The great 50-year achievement of the EU and its promise for the future is that a significant number of countries have formed institutional habits of working together, bargaining together, trading together and arguing together."

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Guest editorial

What it means to be the Church of Jesus Christ

Reflections on an (im)modest proposal

Arie C. Leder

Almost twenty years ago Henry De Moor lamented the growth of ecclesiastical individualism in the CRC ("The CRC on the 'Congregational Way'?" (*Calvin Theological Journal* 23.1 [1988]: 54-60). Within the CRC such individualism means that a local church's council considers itself not only as having original authority but also such original authority that the broader assemblies, classis and synod, may under no circumstances violate the integrity of that council. Thus, a classis has no authority to depose a council, nor would a synod have the authority to depose a classis or a council.

De Moor cites the Maranatha Case (1918), the Common Grace Controversy (1924), and the more recent Goderich Case (1980s) to the contrary. Nevertheless, he argues, local autonomy still "finds a greater hearing among us than does well-established synodical precedent." He continues:

An increasing number of church councils . . . No longer feel the need to seek the Spirit's guidance in the broader assemblies of Christ's church. One consistory decides to install women elders in defiance of the present denominational covenant . . . ; another decides to withhold certain quotas as an expression of locally held views that are firmly set in concrete; yet another publishes a hymnal for local congregational use because the denominational liturgical literature is 'too confining'. (56-57)

Something old something new

Almost twenty years later, Sam Hamstra's "A Modest Proposal" (*The Banner*, March 2007, 18-20) suggests that "the congregational way" may be healthier than ever before in the history of the CRC. Essentially practical and a-theological (for an ACRC), Hamstra represents the entrepreneurial, voluntarist ecclesiology that has increasingly characterized conversation about the nature and task of the CRC.

Within twenty years, then, the discussion has moved from reflecting theologically on the nature of the local church as representing the mystical body of Christ, to arguing for a more effective local church on practical grounds: the denominational approach is not working, let's try the post-modern non-denominational approach; no reflection on the denomination as ecumenism in its simplest form. As in business, so in the church: if one model doesn't work, let's try another. Of this approach to decision-making De Moor writes:

It is not in prayerful gatherings of office-bearers who take

each other seriously as agents of Christ's leading but in the privacy of home or office that arguments and lobbying tactics are conceived. An atmosphere of battle is created and the struggle is carried out in the printed page and in unofficial assemblies that smack of party gatherings. Inevitably, in such an environment, it is almost impossible to keep classical and synodical meetings from descending to Congress-like politics. As in that arena, where special interest groups labor mightily to pressure a majority in the assemblies to opt for 'our side' or even to work out some compromise, no matter how distasteful, so in the church – this rather than a collegial searching for the leading of God. In our secular society, even church government is losing its 'vertical dimension.' (57)

Lobbying the church

The latter part of the 20th century saw lobbying of the right and left become, almost, normal church business in the CRC. The price: a loss of tens of thousands in membership, a diminished ownership of our historic confessional identity, and a steady drift towards evangelical entrepreneurialism.

As De Moor describes it, then it was the "Committee of the Concerned" versus the "Establishment." Soon it would be the Committee for Women in the Christian Reformed Church who sat in synodical delegates' chairs during coffee breaks or appeared en masse, dressed in white, when Synod discussed women in office. Then, an agency which, without synodical approval, began classical renewal programs, political correctness that opened the door to ministry for uncalled and unqualified and anchored the ill-fated Crossroads anti-racism program, the office of Social Justice (although an official agency, it lobbies for social justice positions not approved by Synod, such as the solution to Third World debt, but fails to help congregations to work out our common decisions on abortion, for example), and, more recently, Hearts Aflame, a group lobbying against Synod 2006's decision on women delegates at the broader assemblies. The pressure tactics of the right De Moor decries in his 1988 article have become those of another "wing" of the CRC.

Whether anchored in a theology of the supreme authority of the local church, the politics of lobbying, or well-meant political correctness, these pressure tactics are foreign to the Reformed church polity as understood in the CRC. They balkanize the CRC into interest groups difficult to reconcile with the theological minds of the CRC defined by Henry Stob (the theologically safe, the militant, the positive), Henry Zwaanstra (Confessional Reformed, Separatist Calvinist, American Calvinists), James Bratt (the positive neo-Calvinists, the Confessionalist-seceder, and the defensive and introverted neo-Calvinist). They do express, however, an Americanization of the CRC, but not one envisioned by the American Calvinists Zwaanstra discusses. Lobbying is the American thing to do.

Moreover, pressure tactics do not fit a keen understanding of the church as a community held together by an agreed upon covenant on the church polity level, nor on the ecclesiological level: the church as a community not created by our covenanting with one another, but created by a covenant solemnly sworn by the shed blood of Jesus Christ. We don't keep covenant because it's good for us, or because it endorses a particular understanding of an issue, but because it is an essential part of our nature. Nor do we violate a covenant because the church does not satisfy what an individual, a local church, or an interest group believes ought to be true but is not, or not yet, agreed upon by the church. Temper tantrums are not approved ecclesiastical procedure.

Looking at our own heritage of differences

Edwin Chr. Van Driel, reflecting on the disputes and attempts at unity in the Episcopal Church USA (ECUSA)

writes ("God's Covenant. What it means to be Church," *Christian Century*, January 9, 2007, 8-9):

It is God's covenant that forms the basis of the church. Yes, those of us within the church will at some point find ourselves in disagreement. But our disagreements do not give us the right to suggest that one of us should leave the covenant – because it is God's covenant, not ours. Nor do our disagreements give me the right to suggest that you should move to a table 'further down' – because it is not my table you are invited to, but God's table.

I'm not suggesting that the current disputes and differences in the churches are not serious, or that they do not reflect real and important theological differences. Still we are not invited to the covenant or the table on the basis of our theology; we were invited to the covenant long before we even had a theology. We are invited to the covenant because of grace.

To make the point Van Driel rehearses the history of his own church, the former Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk (NHK; he calls it NRC), now the Protestant Church of the Netherlands (PKN), the church which the ancestors of the CRC left in 1834. He writes:

Some will say that this approach to church and covenant sacrifices truth for unity. I would suggest that we take a lesson from the history of the Netherlands Reformed Church. In the 19th century, some of its ministers denied the resurrection or the divinity of Christ; another minister famously claimed to be a follower of Buddha. The leadership of the church refused to uphold the church's confessional standards. As a result, the majority of the church seemed to have lost its theological identity.

In this situation the orthodox minority found itself divided into two camps on how to respond. One camp thought the church's theological character should be restored by its members appealing to the church's courts and synod. If this did not help, the members would leave the church. This became known as the juridical way. For several decades the juridical camp made its appeals, and when these were unsuccessful, members of the dissenting group left and formed the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (RCN). Meanwhile, the other minority group in the NRC followed the medical way: its members believed that as long as one is not prevented from preaching the gospel, one should never leave the church. They believed that the medicine of the gospel itself can heal a sick church, and although they were weakened by the loss of orthodox allies, members of this group continued to focus on preaching the gospel.

The result seemed predictable. The RCN would become a conservative bulwark, its identity firmly protected by its juridical structure. The NRC would grow more and more liberal, with a slim and powerless conservative minority. But things turned out differently. One hundred years later the RCN found itself at the far left of the theological spectrum, and its international daughter churches, including the Christian Reformed Church in the U.S.A., declared themselves in impaired communion with their mother church. Meanwhile, in the 1930s and 1940s a spirit of renewal began to stir in the NRC. Liberals, middle-of-the-roaders and conservatives became discontented with the perceived theological wishy-washiness of the church.

None of these groups gave up its particular approach to the gospel, but all realized that a church which does not firmly confess its obedience to the gospel of Christ is null and void. In 1950 an overwhelming majority in the synod accepted a new, Christ-centered church order and restored the church's ties to its confessional documents. The preaching of the gospel – and only the preaching – had healed the church.

If this is what it means to be church, being church will never be easy. We find ourselves joined together with people we disagree with, people we do not necessarily like. But that

Christian Courier

Founded in 1945

An independent biweekly that seeks to:
report on significant events in the Christian community
and the world; express opinions infused by Scripture and
rooted in a Reformed perspective;
provide contact for the Christian community.

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Christian Courier

1 Hiscott St, St. Catharines ON L2R 1C7

Tel: (905) 682-8311; 1-800-969-4838

Fax: (905) 682-8313; Web site: www.christiancourier.ca

Publications Mail Registration No. 09375

We acknowledge the assistance of the Government of Canada,
through the Publications Assistance Program
(PAP), toward our mailing costs.

Canada

Opinion

God(s) in the house: From faith to hopeful citizenship

Harry Kits

Marci McDonald's cover story in the October issue of *The Walrus* magazine was one of several recent articles to raise the spectre of the fearful impact of "evangelical" Christians and others of faith on public life. Under the cover title "Jesus in the House," the article attempts to make a case that the "stern, narrow-minded theocracy" of American televangelists is being espoused in Canada through some of the "most outspoken players in this country's religious right wing." McDonald suggests that not only do these "players" have the ear of the Prime Minister, but that Stephen Harper's own religious journey puts him firmly in the theo-con path.

The relationship of faith and politics often generates passionate debate, fears, and letters to the editor. Interest in the topic has been sharpened by the rise to power of the current version of the Conservative Party, and the association made by observers and party members between the party's policy directions and particular expressions of Christian faith.

Wading through the various positions on this touchy issue is challenging. CPJ has a long history of both being a faith based organization in political debates and speaking out about how faith can and should affect policy-making in Canada. CPJ promotes respect and dialogue to find policy options that create space for difference. Our pending move to Ottawa is intended to bring this history and experience front and centre in the nation's capital.

God(s) in the House

Provocative articles like McDonald's invoke the predictable response that "religion has no place in public life." However, this is an impossible proposition. Faith commitments – our deepest commitments – shape how each of us interacts with our neighbours, our institutions, and our environment.

In fact, everyone does bring their faith to the public square, as well as to other areas of life; work, school, family, the media, and so on. If religion is understood to be one's ultimate commitment or life orientation, then it cannot be confined to private life, or particular rituals or institutions. Such ultimate

Guest editorial continued

is exactly what God's covenant is all about: God reaches out to people who are not likable – people who are sinners. It is only because God graciously embraces these imperfect human beings that any of us have a chance to be included in God's covenant.

If this is what it means to be church, then being church is also profoundly countercultural. One reason why the Episcopalian left and right so easily embrace Archbishop Williams's ideas may be that those ideas perfectly match the American emphasis on freedom and choice. If there is any place for the church to be countercultural, however, it is in situations in which we are called to remember our original covenant.

'You did not choose me but I chose you' (John 15:16). As a church we are called

commitments are not restricted to formally recognized religions, such as Christianity and Islam: liberalism, humanism, and capitalism are also religious value systems. People place their ultimate commitment in the forces of the market, or the state, or human rights, or the scientific method.

Ultimate commitments give meaning and direction to one's whole life, as well as to the institutions and the society in which one participates. They shape how people tackle issues in the public square. The faith perspectives of all Canadians influence how they participate as citizens in building and shaping Canadian society.

Canada is a country consisting of persons, communities and institutions committed to different faiths. Therefore, we must find ways of guarding freedom of religion and rejecting attempts to impose freedom from religion. People in Canadian society have different beliefs and wish to live in different ways. Government should protect and facilitate their right to do so.

So God is in the House, and in fact there are many gods in the House of Commons. The important choices being made in that place are shaped by the deepest commitments of MPs and other decision makers – whether a formal religious commitment or a commitment to the demands of the marketplace, or to human rights, or to the forces of democracy itself.

The real question of faith and politics is not if, but how, God is in the House, and how people of faith can contribute to a hopeful citizenship.

Unhelpful caricatures

Whatever the truth of McDonald's piece, it was not the only recent article to express worry about those on the so-called political right who are explicit about their faith commitments. *The Globe and Mail* printed a feature article in September under the title "In Ottawa, faith makes a leap to the right." *Globe* columnist John Ibbitson went so far as to write that if people take their faith seriously, their "worldview reflects barbarism" and they cannot and should not engage with "secular Canadian society."

formed, judged and renewed not by our own choices, but only by God. (8-9)

Now what?

In its solemn gatherings for worship and through all its assemblies, the CRC is an expression of the mystical body of Christ, who unites us to himself by the covenant he made in his blood. He made us before we made the CRC. That is our historic confession, warts and all. But none of those warts is the "congregational way," in any of its older or contemporary forms. Let's keep the covenant into which Christ called us. Let's keep the church polity covenant we believe best reflects that calling of our Lord.

*Posted by crconnect at
crconnect.blogspot.com*

Too often commentators employ simplistic caricatures to support their 'opinionating.' They easily label someone as on the religious right or left, and correspondingly on the political right or left. Whole meanings and positions are attributed to someone by their label.

The same happens when someone is religiously labeled as "evangelical" or "Muslim" or "United Church." Based on a particular label, assumptions are made about the views of a person or community with regards to, for example, gender relations, the Middle East conflict, or preferred political party. However, it is clear that within any of these religious communities there are strong differences of views on various public issues, and members vote across the party spectrum.

Unfortunately, people of faith fall into the same trap. When spokespersons or press releases say that "Christians call for" or "evangelicals call for," they sweep a whole group of people up into the label and impose a view on that group, whether or not all the members agree. (This is different for institutions that confer authority on spokespersons through a decision-making process.) Similarly, when people of faith lament the "liberal, secular left establishment," it is not clear to whom they are referring.

To hopeful citizenship

Rather than dismissing the place of faith or engaging in simplistic caricatures, we need to acknowledge and respect the deepest commitments of Canadians. We also need to engage in a careful discussion on their appropriate role in the public square. We need to draw out the best in faith-based contributions to public life, working out the implications for the common good: whether addressing how to create a sustainable economy, how to address inequality, or how we position Canada in the world.

Janice Gross Stein, in an essay in the *Literary Review of Canada*, asks thoughtful and probing questions about Canada's commitment to multiculturalism (including multi-faith). According to Gross Stein, mul-

ticulturalism "is being tested by a resurgence of orthodoxy in Christianity, Islam and Judaism where lines of division between 'them' and 'us' are being drawn more sharply. And it is being tested because Canadians are uncertain about what limits, if any, there are to embedding diverse cultures and religious traditions in the Canadian context."

Rather than simply dismissing the place of religion in the public square, Gross Stein calls for a renewed debate on these difficult questions. She asks what to do when "my religious obligation clashes openly and directly with values that I hold deeply as a Canadian."

As Gross Stein acknowledges, too often the temptation for people of faith, including those with a secular faith, is to try to impose a sense of "just us," not "justice." We try to use the government to impose a particular religious point of view to the exclusion of others. In that way, faith commitments lose credibility and no longer enrich the common good.

Canadian citizens need to engage in debate about our public life together, with a clear eye to our core values and faith perspectives. We must engage each other in the public square to shape actual policies and programs that contribute to the common good. This must be done across faiths and ultimate commitments, and also within them.

People who hold strongly to their particular faiths have much to contribute to the common good, and do much through their communities. The challenge is to identify how to engage in the public sphere in a way that can best contribute to a pluralist Canada.

From this respectful dialogue we can influence the shaping of public values that can be the basis of policies contributing to the well-being of all and the integrity of creation. This open and respectful wrestling around core commitments needs to be the hallmark of Canadian democracy. It is this dynamic that will help to shape a politics of hopeful citizenship.

Harry Kits is the executive director of Citizens for Public Justice.

The Catalyst, winter 2007, Volume 30 / Number 1

Christian Courier

Member of Canadian Church Press and Evangelical Press Association

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Address all correspondence to: 1 Hiscott St, St. Catharines ON L2R 1C7
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PRINTED IN CANADA

Letters/Opinion

Is Pico in Heaven?

Frank De Vries

"Hey, why don't we ask Mr. D.? " The grade 3 teacher was in the school library having a lively discussion with her class about animals who had died and whether or not they would go to heaven, when I happened to walk in.

The teacher told me that Gloria had had a hamster by the name of Pico, that over the weekend Pico had died, and a sorrowing Gloria had asked her parents if Pico was now in heaven. The parents had told her they didn't know for sure, but suggested she ask her teacher, for, they had said, schoolteachers are *very* smart.

This, of course, is true, as is shown by what the teacher did when I walked in. She didn't know how to answer the question either, so she turned to the fount of all knowledge about all such and other matters: me.

Immediately I spied an ominous cloud of trouble on the horizon.

Someone once said, "Death is an extremely dull and dreary affair. I advise everyone to have absolutely nothing to do with it." And here I was, without warning being confronted with the death of a hamster, and by virtue of that expired rodent suddenly *having* something to do with death.

What was I going to say? "No, sorry girl. Animals don't have a soul. Animals die, and that's it. Gone. Nothing. Zilch. Zip. Nada. Forget it. Get another one."

But how could I give such a, perhaps factual, but unfeeling, cold-hearted response to a little girl?

Breaking out into a mental sweat, I imprudently told the class, "Well, I can't tell you right now because I don't really know either. But I'll think about it and I'll drop by your class tomorrow and will try to answer



your question."

Eternal Student

Peter Schuurman



Growing up in the ghetto

I grew up in the ghetto in Toronto. Not the ghetto you are thinking of – with dark alleys, gangs, and poverty-stricken families struggling for survival. I'm referring to a tight, homogeneous religious community – a three-legged stool of home, church and school where mostly Dutch Canadians sat each day. Blood relations were close, and it seemed every second kid was a cousin to someone. This "Reformed Bubble," as I would later call it (or more cynically, "The Compound"), even had its own unique language. Words like "predestination" and "TULIP" were familiar, and playful banter about "doekies" and "Mr. Vandervandersma" were common. Strangers knew that there was an "inside" and an "outside" to this peculiar urban community.

As we grew up we became more and more conscious of the uniqueness of this experience. Some like myself left to explore other ghettos and then returned. Others, including friends of mine considered it oppressive, backwards, or too small or too religious and have since left for greener ghettos. While I acknowledge all these criticisms to be partly true, I have been getting pretty philosophical about "ghettos" lately, and want to try and string together a few otherwise scattered thoughts.

The ghetto as confining tutelage

My basic argument is that human beings, unless they isolate themselves and become less than human, are ghettoized beings. We come in packs, groups, communities, traditions, tribes and tongues and it is virtually impossible to rise above these inter-relationships. In sum, we are social creatures.

You might think this an obvious thing. But consider the ways of modern humanity. If Kant is the exemplar of the modern sensibility, and he is usually taken as such, he saw human beings progressing beyond tradition to individual autonomy. This was "enlightenment":

man's release from his self-incurred tutelage. Tutelage is the incapacity to use one's own understanding without the guidance of another. Such tutelage is self-imposed if its cause is not lack of intelligence, but rather a lack of determination and courage to use one's intelligence without being guided by another.

Kant suggested that to accept authority outside of yourself was imprisonment. "Have courage to use your own reason!" he said, as if one could exist as an autonomous unit apart from language and relationships and create some neutral self-originating reality.

The postmodern critique of modernity is this: no one is autonomous, neutral, self-creating. We are all traditioned, webbed, socially pre-conditioned. In fact, to be otherwise, or to consider oneself otherwise, puts one in danger of oppressing others and becoming alienated from oneself. At best, we only move from one ghetto to another.

The good ghetto

James K. A. Smith in his book *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism? Taking Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault to Church* maintains that to be a creature is to be a historically conditioned being, and there is no way to float above our temporality as the moderns suggested. He investigates George Weigel's description of growing up in a distinctly Catholic tradition in his book *Letters to a Young Catholic* and quotes a section where Weigel elaborates on our ghettoized nature:

The most ghettoized people of all are those who don't know they grew up in a particular time and place and culture, and who think they can get to universal truths outside particular realities and communities... The real question is not whether you grow up in a ghetto, but whether the ideas and customs and rhythms of your particular ghetto prepare you to engage other ideas and customs and life experiences without losing touch with your roots.

Kant lived in a modern ghetto and he didn't realize it. I grew up in a Reformed ghetto and was hyper-aware of it. If the question that remains is whether I was prepared adequately to love and engage the world, I would say it this way: in some ways very poorly, in other ways very well. Today, this ghetto is changing, becoming more diverse, and in many ways is threatened by mass culture. I would loathe to see it lost.

When I look at the best of our Reformed tradition I am impressed with a theological richness that embraces all creation, all learning, and even offers a way to embrace a principled pluralism as the best idea for human society. When I look at my young son I am reminded that it takes a whole ghetto to raise a child. And though he may someday take himself out of the ghetto, he can never take the ghetto out of himself. I hope he comes to embrace his ghetto, and in doing so, a part of himself and in turn the whole world. For the more particular we are, the more universal we become.

Peter Schuurman is the Christian Reformed Education Mission Leader and resides in Guelph, Ontario.

On the way home and throughout the evening the question continued to haunt me. Will hamsters go to heaven when they die?

My first inclination would be to say, no, animals don't go to heaven when they die. When God made man he "...created man in his own image" and "...breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being" (Gen. 1:27 and 2: 7, NIV). The King James says it even more pointedly, for it translates Gen. 2:7 as: "...and man became a living soul." Therefore, as only man was "breathed into," I figured hamsters don't have a soul, and therefore hamsters wouldn't go to heaven.

But then, somewhat facetiously, one might ask, "Might distinctions perhaps be made between *wild* hamsters, *domesticated* hamsters in general, and *domesticated* hamsters in *Christian* homes?"

Of course I could talk to the kids about some of the New Creation imagery of Revelation 21 and 22, and with that could paint word pictures of lambs and wolves resting together, leopards, goats and grizzlies gamboling about in the high grass, and children leading calves and lions by a string. And I might even say something about hamsters. But would that really answer the question?

In the end I became thoroughly convinced it is really impossible for anyone to answer Gloria's question definitively, and that by merely attempting to do so we may well be trespassing into God's domain. Yet I found it possible to offer a glimmer of hope and comfort to a sad little girl.

In Chapter 11 Isaiah tells us that there will come a day that "...the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord." So perhaps it is quite okay to think that on that day Pico, too, will be doing his brand-new little hamster thing in the New Creation, and be filled with the knowledge of the Lord.

Next day, in a gentle way, I tried to explain to Gloria and the other children in class that this was perhaps the best and most

Stewardship

New resource focussing on discipleship is launched by Faith Alive

"Editors at Faith Alive kept hearing the same thing," explains Bob DeMoor, former theological editor at Faith Alive Christian Resources. "People were dissatisfied with adult education offerings. There was," he says, "no integration in the way we're continuing our journey with the Lord."

Rev. Kirsty DePree, Discipleship Coordinator for the Reformed Church in America, has also noted the same challenge and adds, "There's a real struggle out there how to express the Reformed faith today." In response, Faith Alive developed Disciples, a multi-year program for life-long adult learning and faith formation.

Disciples begins with the conviction that discipleship is not something we learn in classes, but something we live out in lives transformed by Christ. To plant the call to discipleship at the congregation's heart, Disciples opens with Follow Me, a five week program that combines worship, daily readings and group study, all built around the basic "what" and "why" of discipleship. Following the congregational-wide programming, Disciples continues to build with a set of four five-week study/discussion modules, each focused on important aspects of discipleship.

Rev. Leonard Vander Zee, newly appointed Editor in Chief of Faith Alive expressed his excitement in taking over the development of this program. "For a long time I have felt challenged by Jesus' call to "make disciples" right in our congregations. Healthy, growing churches are built on the foundation of members who are growing as disciples in the school of Christ, and making disciples of others. That calls for a comprehensive, spiritually transforming, faith formation program for adults. And that's what Disciples is all about!"

Disciples can work in a variety of small group and adult education settings. Each study combines traditional Bible study with interactive questions and activities, to better match the different learning styles of today's adult learners.

Part of engaging the congregation is a five-week devotional written by Peter Slofstra and Peter Schuurman. Their first devotional was the well-received *Pumped!*, written as a series of meditations for the 2005 cycling tour, "Sea to Sea with the CRC", where the two also served as co-chaplains.

Disciples will be released in September. Preview materials will ship in April. CRC and RCA churches will receive a preview packet automatically. To learn more, visit www.GrowDisciples.org.



Is Pico in Heaven? continued

hopeful answer anyone could give to her question. The Lord must also be really pleased, I added, to know that a girl like Gloria had loved one of his little creatures so much. Because she was sad, I told her, the Lord was sad, too, and I suggested she should talk to him about it. I promised her that he would comfort her, and that he even would make her happy again.

The response by the class was muted – as only it could have been. Still, as I went home later that day, somewhere in the back of my mind I could not help but wonder where Pico was now ... or even if he would, eh ... be! After all, what was it that was in Pico when he was alive but is now no longer there?

And whatever that was, where might that be today?

Writing letter to the editor

Reflections on Stewardship

Rick De Graaf

Gifts of Appreciated Securities

This week we look at a charitable giving opportunity that multiplies the benefits to you and to the charities you may want to support through the giving of appreciated securities.

The Federal government, in its 2006 Federal budget, delivered on its election promise to allow the donation of publicly traded securities [shares or mutual funds] directly to charities with no payment of capital gains tax. In the most recent budget this was extended to gifts to Foundations, with certain restrictions. So, those stocks you bought many years ago which are worth ten times the amount paid for them, or the stock certificates you received when your insurance company de-mutualized ten years ago could be used to make a valuable gift to charity.

Before going any further, I agree with those who say that tax savings ought not to be the motive for giving. It should not be the *primary* motive for giving, rather, that should be the prompting in your heart. However, in my opinion, tax saving strategies should be taken advantage of and used to facilitate wise or even shrewd (or clever) stewardship. As stewards, I believe, we should take advantage of provisions in taxation rules that helps us support 'Kingdom' initiatives in order to maximize our giving. At CSS, we have found that this option of giving securities directly has generated a lot of activity for us, and a lot of money for charities.

In order to appreciate the benefit better, consider the following example that contrasts the difference between selling the shares and giving the results to charity or donating the shares directly.

	Sell the shares and donate the cash to charity	Donate the shares directly to charity
Purchase Price (1996)	\$2,000	\$2,000
Current value (2007)	\$10,000	\$10,000
Capital Gain	\$8,000	\$8,000
Net Taxable Gain @ 50%	\$4,000	Nil
Net Tax Payable @ 45%	\$1,800	Nil
Tax credit @ 45% of \$10,000	\$4,500	\$4,500

The additional tax savings of gifting shares directly to charity is \$1,800

As you can tell by the example in the table above, giving the shares or mutual funds directly to a charity provides additional savings of \$1,800 on top of the regular tax credit!

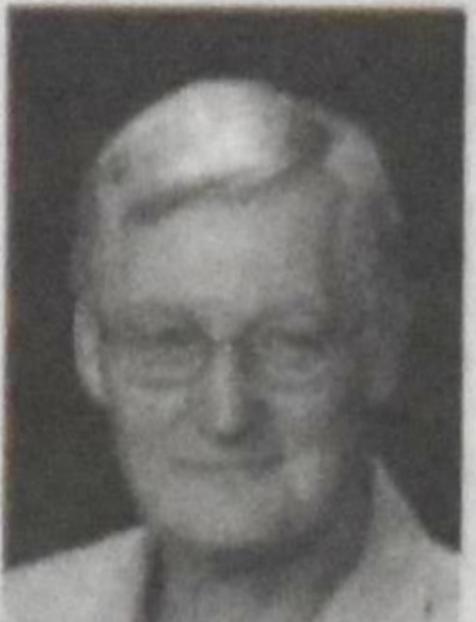
If you have further questions or are wondering how to go about donating securities – see your financial advisor or call Christian Stewardship Services (CSS). CSS can direct your gifts to one or as many charities as you are prompted in your heart to support. Or CSS can help you establish a Donor Advised Fund to distribute your gifts on your own timetable.

Stewardly Tip: Use experts. Unless you are an expert yourself, being a do-it-yourselfer when it comes to investments, stocks, mutual funds and other financial tools, can actually cost you more in fees, lost saving opportunities or unexpected taxes than it would if you had enlisted the services of an expert whom you can trust. Choose someone who will take the time to explain his or her advice in terms that you can understand.

Readers: Share your Stewardly Tips so that we all can make better use of the resources God has entrusted to us. Submit your suggestions (by mail to *Christian Courier* or by email to my address below) and provide your contact information so that we can acknowledge your contribution or ask you for more details.

Next issue: Jubilee Stewardship

Rick DeGraaf works for Christian Stewardship Services in Markham, Ontario Rick's email: rickd@csservices.ca



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Church

Nigeria: Muslims club Christian teacher to death



GOMBE, Nigeria (Compass Direct News) – Christianah Oluwasesin, a teacher at Government Secondary School of Gandu in this northern Nigerian town, was in high spirits Wednesday, March 21 as she made her way to school, where she teaches government.

She was happy that after the final day of exams, she would be joining her husband in their hometown of Abeokuta, in the southwestern state of Ogun; a few months earlier, her husband Femi Oluwasesin had gone to Abeokuta to take a hospital position as a laboratory technician. The high school teacher's joyous mood had been noted not only that day but the previous one, as she was seen taking pictures and exchanging pleasantries with friends and colleagues.

Soon her happiness would be cut short. Muslim students at the school, along with outside Islamic extremists, murdered Oluwasesin on March 21 over claims that she desecrated the Quran. They beat, stoned, and clubbed her to death, then burned her corpse.

As a supervisor of a class writing a final examination on Islamic Religious knowledge on that day, Oluwasesin was responsible for ensuring that students strictly kept rules and to prevent mischief in the hall, which had become common among cheating students, said Aluke Musa Yila, a fellow teacher at the school.

Musa told Compass that Oluwasesin had collected papers, books and bags before the exam in the all-girls class, in accordance with school procedures to prevent cheating, and dropped the materials in front of the class.

"Usually such items are returned to every student as each returns her answer script," Musa said. "Soon after the bags collected by Oluwasesin were dropped in front of the class, one of the girls in the class began to cry. She told her colleagues that she had a copy of the Quran in her bag, that Oluwasesin touched the bag, and that by doing so she had desecrated the Quran, since she was a Christian."

Soon after the student raised this alarm, other students in class began to shout "Allahu Akbar [God is great]."

"It was at this point that I was attracted to the riotous scene in that class, and I then rushed there," said Musa. "How could a teacher know that there was a copy of the Quran in a student's bag if this was not pointed out to her?"

He notified Malam Baba Musa, patron of the Muslim Students' Society at the school. The MSS patron, along with three other school staff members, went to the classroom to try to bring calm, Musa said. In the rauous confusion, he managed to rush Oluwasesin out of class to the principal's office.

"The principal left me and Oluwasesin in his office and also went there to calm down the Muslim students," he said. "Knowing that the students may soon come to this office, I pushed Oluwasesin into the bathroom in this office and then locked up the office."

By the time he had rejoined the principal and other staff members, he said, the entire school was engulfed in uproar. Muslim extremists from outside the school rushed in to join in the unrest.

"They destroyed school property and were demanding that Oluwasesin must be given to them to be stoned to

death," Musa said. "When we would not give in by releasing Oluwasesin to them, they started stoning us."

Pandemonium prevented school or law enforcement officials from getting Oluwasesin out of the school, he said.

"While we were thinking of ways to take Oluwasesin out of the school, the Muslims broke into the principal's office and dragged her out," he said. "The principal rushed there to save her as they clubbed her with an iron on the head and blood was gushing out from the wounded side of the head. He was pleading that they should not kill her, but they were insisting that she must be killed."

"The principal succeeded in getting Oluwasesin up to the school gate," he said. "There was a house near the gate, and he dragged her into the house, but the rioting Muslims went into the house and dragged her out again. This time, they clubbed her to death, brought old mats and placed dirt on her corpse, and then burned the body."

Quran unfound

Musa said he was baffled that throughout the unrest, the copy of the Quran supposed to have been desecrated was never seen, nor was it produced by the offended student.

"Whether the Quran was in the bag of that student, nobody knows," he said.

Attempts by at least four policemen to quell the unrest failed as they were forced to retreat, Musa told Compass.

"The Muslims smashed the car of Oluwasesin, which was parked in the car park attached to the building housing the library, office and some classrooms," he said. "Her car was set on fire, and soon the entire building went up in flames."

Along with Oluwasesin's car, the school library, and other offices near the parking lot were all burned, he said. When the Fire Brigade arrived, he said, Muslims prevented firemen from coming into the school by pelting them with stones.

The Government Secondary School of Gandu has a student population of about 4,000, about 10 percent of whom are Christian, Musa said.

All secondary schools in the Gombe metropolitan area have been shut down indefinitely to avert a spread of the crisis, according to news reports.

Authorities have arrested at least 12 students involved in the killing, according to Voice of America. A five-member committee appointed by the state to investigate the incident is due to present findings in two weeks.

In February 2006 in the neighboring state of Bauchi, at least 20 Christians were killed and two churches were burned down by Muslims furious that a Christian high school teacher had tried to confiscate a Quran from a student who was reading it during class.

Church in mourning

Asked whether there had been any past misunderstandings between Oluwasesin and her Muslim colleagues or students, Musa said there had been no underlying motives for killing her.

"She has never had any problem with any Muslim, whether a teacher or a student, in the three years she was in this school," he said.

The killing of Oluwasesin shocked the Christian community in Gombe and has left her church devastated. Oluwasesin was a Sunday school teacher and a member of her church's prayer team. She and her husband had gone to Gombe on a one-year mandatory National Youth Service Scheme of the Nigerian government. After the service year, in which both of them excelled, they were employed by the Gombe state government, she as a teacher and he as a laboratory technician at a hospital in town.

Oluwasesin was the mother of two children.

Oxford atheist ridiculed by Anglican theologian during debate

Jonathan Luxmoore

Oxford, England (ENI) – Crusading pro-evolution scientist Richard Dawkins has had his anti-religious claims ridiculed during an Oxford debate with a theologian who once was an atheist like the evolutionist, who is devout in his public denunciations of religion.

"Having been an atheist, I discovered religion was in fact an enormously powerful, transformative power for good," said Alister McGrath, Oxford University's professor of Historical Theology. "The claim that the scientific explanation ends everything, ignores fundamental realities. There's a whole range of human experiences, often involving a longing for something beyond us which brings legitimacy to our core notions and philosophical ideas."

The 54-year-old Anglican priest was debating with Dawkins during Oxford's Literary Festival in March. Dawkins' post as professor of the Public Understanding of Science at Oxford is funded by Hungarian-born Microsoft millionaire Charles Simonyi. His attacks on religion are frequent, and he set up a foundation in December to send atheist books and DVDs to schools in Britain and the United States.

"Far from being enriching, religion is stultifying, impoverishing and limiting," said Dawkins, whose book, *The God Delusion*, has sold a million copies since publication in 2006. "Science and religion both attempt to answer the same questions – the difference is that religion gets the answers wrong," the atheist campaigner asserted.

McGrath said, however, science was unable to provide a "guiding moral vision". He noted that non-believers such as the writer Iris Murdoch had agreed on the necessity of a transcendent basis for ethical decisions.

"Although I can't prove Christianity, as I can prove the structure of DNA is a double helix, it is a hypothesis which makes perfect sense, and which gives direction and animation to life," said McGrath, who became a Christian after studying chemistry and molecular biophysics. McGrath recently published *The Dawkins Delusion* as a riposte to the scientist's book.

"Belief in God creates an explanatory framework, which enables you to appreciate and value the sciences while also seeing beyond the beauty and glory of the world to something enriching and ennobling," contended McGrath.

Describing his book as a "consciousness-raising exercise", Dawkins belongs to the London-based National Secular Society, which has since the 19th century campaigned to make Britain atheist. In his speech Dawkins said he had "disposed one by one" of arguments for God's existence, and believed it was "a form of child abuse" to assume children inherited their parents' religion "without consent".

McGrath, however, rejected this, arguing Dawkins had ignored "the dialectic between proving and giving reasons for something," and had falsely assumed science eliminated "the conceptual space for God". "Religion has the capacity to go seriously wrong – it can be dogmatic, intolerant and aggressive, as can other worldviews," said McGrath. "But it can also provide a moral stimulus and raise our imaginative capacities to new heights. For every grand tragedy involving religion, there've been ten thousand acts of personal kindness and social good."



Dawkins

Church

Pope leads calls for EU to acknowledge Christian values

Luigi Sandri

Rome (ENI) – Church leaders in Europe have marked the 50th anniversary of the European Union, many urging that the grouping should make explicit the role played by Christianity in the development of the continent.

"Christianity contributed to build up the historical, moral and cultural values of Europe, values which are the soul of the continent," Pope Benedict XVI told delegates attending a congress in Rome on the future of Europe organized by the Commission of the (Roman Catholic) Bishops' Conferences of the European Community (COMECE).

"Is it not a surprise that contemporary Europe, although it wishes to present

itself as a community of values, seems more and more to contest the existence of universal and absolute values?" Pope Benedict said on March 24. "Does not this unique form of 'apostasy' from itself, even prior to an apostasy from God, lead to doubts about its identity?"

The Treaty of Rome, which created the European Economic Community, the precursor of today's EU, was signed in the Italian capital on March 25, 1957. Then the grouping consisted of six countries – Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands. The European Union now brings together 27 nations.

In Berlin, where European government

leaders gathered to mark the anniversary, Germany's top Protestant bishop, Wolfgang Huber, urged that a future constitution for the EU should make explicit reference to God, the German Protestant news agency epd reported.

The European conception of humanity is based "on the conviction that God created human beings in his own image," Huber wrote in an article published in the *Bild am Sonntag* newspaper. This means that human beings have an inviolable and inalienable dignity, said Huber, who heads the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD). "This should be clearly stated in a European constitution in order to make clear what the soul of Europe is."

Swedish church says matrimony is only for heterosexuals

Peter Kenny

Lund, Sweden (ENI) – The Church of Sweden, the largest national church in the Lutheran World Federation, says it will oppose a recommendation made on March 21 by a one-person commission to the country's government that laws should be passed to enable homosexual couples to marry.

"We support the view that matrimony is between a man and a woman. This is a commonly accepted definition acceptable to most societies and religions," Archbishop Anders Wejryd, the Church of Sweden primate (leader), told Ecumenical News International before addressing a media conference on the issue.

"The Church of Sweden of course will continue to give its blessing to same sex couples in partnerships, as we have done for some time. Same sex couples in committed, faithful relationships are entitled to God's blessing," said the archbishop, who took his place at the helm of the church in 2006.

The Swedish government released a report conducted by a commission of inquiry into marriage and partnerships, to which churches and other faiths were able to comment. Clerics from a number of religions can legally conduct marriages under Swedish law.

"This is a start," Wejryd told journalists, as he explained that the Swedish church wanted to enhance the legal framework for people living in fidelity in same sex relationships. "There are positive things in this report. Our main criticism is with the terminology."

The release of the commission's report is the start of a consultation process.

Despite saying matrimony is only for heterosexual couples, the Church of Sweden, which was a pacesetter in granting a special blessing for same sex couples, has faced considerable criticism from some other Lutheran churches, particularly those in African countries.

The timing of the report also coincides with the celebrations for the 60th anniversary of the founding of the LWF in 1947, in Lund, the southern Swedish city where a meeting of the 66.7 million-strong federation's main governing body is taking place.

The general secretary of the LWF, the Rev. Ishmael Noko, a Zimbabwean theologian, urged the federation's member churches to engage in dialogue on the issues of "marriage, family and sexuality in an inclusive manner" in order to avoid making it a church-dividing issue.

Nearly 500 participants, including 105 church leaders from around the world, are expected at the March 20 to 27 events hosted by the Church of Sweden and its Diocese of Lund. "Living in Communion in the World Today" is the theme of the gathering.

Archbishop Wejryd said that churches, and especially Lutheran ones, always engaged in strong debate about changing attitudes on once-established norms such as slavery, circumcision or women clergy, and he expected churches to do so on issues around the family, relationships and sexuality.

Dutch churches want new thinking on EU

Andreas Hovinga

Utrecht, the Netherlands (ENI) – The Council of Churches in the Netherlands, where voters in 2005 rejected a draft constitution for the European Union, has urged the country's new government to come up with ideas on how to strengthen the 27-nation grouping.

"A central role must be given to the values of reconciliation, peace, solidarity, human dignity, religious freedom and human rights, and democracy," the church council stated in a message to mark the 50th anniversary of the foundation of the EU, which fell on March 25. "Based on these values, which have their origins in the Christian and humanistic heritage of Europe, the EU as a community of law must be reinforced."

A centre-left coalition government was installed in the Netherlands in February following elections three months earlier, replacing the previous centre-right government.

The church council said fresh thinking was needed about issues such as the reform of EU structures, bridging the gap between the Union and its citizens, and policy on cross-border issues such as the environment issues and organized crime.

The 17 denominations that form the council, include the two largest in the country, the Roman Catholic Church and the Protestant Church in the Netherlands.

The Dutch church council said it supported similar statements made by two European church bodies, the Commission

of the (Roman Catholic) Bishops' Conferences of the European Community (COMECE), and the Conference of European Churches (CEC), which groups principally Orthodox, Protestant and Anglican denominations.

In a separate statement, the Brussels-based director of CEC's Church and Society Commission, the Rev. Rudiger Noll, said the European Union had been "a success story".

He said: "It brought about peace, reconciliation and prosperity." The enlargement of the grouping to include former communist countries in eastern Europe was a sign, Noll said, that "the division of Europe into two antagonistic political and economic systems, the period of the Cold War has come to an end."

Christianity's growth is reshaping China, says religion expert

Martin Revis

London (ENI) – Increasing interest in Christianity among Chinese intellectuals is transforming the country's religious landscape, says Edmond Tang, an academic and consultant on China for British and Irish churches.

"Today it is an open secret that Christian fellowships, a new kind of 'house church', run by Chinese professors and students, are active in most Chinese universities," said Tang in comments marking the relaunch of the *China Study Journal*, a publication analyzing religious policy in China.

More than 30 academic faculties and research centres in China are now dedicated to the study of a "once maligned religion", whereas a few years ago there were only three, Tang noted at a March 26 media conference in London. He said he was optimistic about the prospects for faith in China.

Chinese government figures put the number of Protestants at 16 million and Roman Catholics at five million, although it is likely that there are actually three times that number of Christians, said Tang, who heads the Centre for East Asian Christianity at the University of Birmingham.

The *China Study Journal* is a joint venture of Birmingham university and Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, which groups Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican, Protestant and Pentecostal traditions.

The Churches Together group is responding to the upsurge in faith by expanding its program of visits and exchanges run by its China desk in association with partners.

Caroline Fielder, the director of CTBI's China desk, told Ecumenical News International that two areas of recent innovation are prayer links between

British churches and Chinese Christian worshippers, and British volunteers who assist their Chinese counterparts in teaching English to rural people.

The *China Study Journal* is edited by Tang and published twice a year. The current issue contains an evaluation of the 2005 Chinese regulations on religious affairs. Five religions are officially recognized in China: Buddhism, Roman Catholicism, Daoism (Taoism), Islam and Protestantism.

The publication has its roots in a research project begun in the 1970s at the height of the Cultural Revolution, a period when China was cut off from the outside world, and when churches and other religious organizations in China were forbidden, the CTBI noted.

:: Information on the *China Study Journal* is available from: china.desk@ctbi.org.uk

Women/Kids

Celebrating women



Icon of Thecla: one of many women celebrated as saints.

Every year, on March 8, the world pays special attention to women. The United Nations officially instituted March 8 as International Women's Day in 1975. However, unofficially it was celebrated much earlier. In 1909 the Socialist Party in the United States organized the first National Women's Day in honor of striking women garment workers protesting deplorable working conditions. In Copenhagen in 1910, 100 women from 17 countries, gathered to establish a Women's Day. A year later that number increased to a million women. On March 8 in Russia in 1917, women took to the streets for the right to vote. Shortly after, the Russian tsar abdicated and the new government granted their request. Here in Alberta, it was in 1917, the Famous Five women started their campaign to be legally declared *persons*.

Emily Murphy was one of these five women. She heard that husbands could legally sell family farms and leave wives and children homeless and in poverty. Emily and four women, Nellie McClung, Irene Parlby, Henrietta Muir Edwards, and Louise McKinney decided to pressure the government to set up a special court for women, presided over by women. Their efforts were successful. However, the new court was soon challenged, because women were not deemed to be *persons* under the British North America Act. After 12 years of debate women were finally declared legal *persons* in 1929. The legislation was a milestone in Canadian history. A statue in honor of the Famous Five now adorns the legislative building in Ottawa.

Over history we see many examples of courageous women demanding respect and fair recognition. In the 16th century, Theresa of Avila and Hildegard von Bingen were nuns who dedicated their lives to the service of God and neighbor. At the same time they suffered unspeakably under the rule of patriarchal church leaders and hierarchical church structures. Earlier yet, Roman women are known to have rebelled against being solely defined in terms of their relationship to men – as wives, sisters, daughters or mothers. They also appear to have rallied against a ruling limiting the amount of gold they could wear as it seduced men. Women were to marry, have children and submit. This stable family pattern was needed to maintain the

Building Trust

Vicky Van Andel Ed.



cultural status quo in Roman society.

In Biblical times, women also lived by prescribed roles. They were expected to remain in the background and manage households. It is clear that Jesus broke through the prejudices against women by interacting with them respectfully. However, his example was not always followed by the people of his day. One example of a biblical woman subjected to cultural pressures is Thecla, who lived during the time of Paul. We read about Thecla in *The Acts of Thecla*, an apocryphal book. While its authenticity has not been established, it serves as an interesting example of attitudes towards women in times of the early church.

As the story is told, Thecla met Paul when he visited the city of Iconium, where she lived. Paul was preaching on the beatitudes, including the spiritual rewards of purity and virginity. Thecla who was about to be married, is mesmerized by Paul. She abandons her marriage. Her husband becomes angry and orders her burned on the stake. Thecla is saved by a sudden rainfall. Shortly after, she is subjected to the advances of a wealthy man. When she rejects him, he orders her thrown before wild animals. She is saved by a circle of supportive women who shower the animals with potent herbs causing them to fall asleep. Finally Paul commissions her to "go and teach the word of God." She does this. Eventually she reunites with her family.

The story of Junia is an example of the invisibility of women during the time of the early church. Junia is mentioned in Romans 16:7 where Paul says: "Greet Andronicus and Junia, my relatives, who have been in prison with me. They are outstanding among the apostles and they were in Christ before I was." Paul calls Junia an apostle, and Junia appears to have been a woman. However, for centuries Bible translators believed she must have been a man, since they believed apostles were men, and named her Junias. Only recently can the name Junia be found in Romans 16:7.

Of my four different Bible versions, two refer to Junia and two to Junias. Of my several books on women in the Bible, just one mentions Junia. To add to the mystery, Junias appears not to have been a common masculine name in the first and second century. It is clear Jesus surrounded himself with women, thereby recognizing their free and equal status. However, it appears that ancient cultures, as well as the culture in the early church, marginalized women. For that reason the lived experiences of women in history has remained virtually unrecorded. And Junia got lost.

International Women's Day celebrates the determination of women to be free, capable and equal persons in their own right. It is a symbolic day. Let's continue to honor this special day until such time that stories of inequality, injustice, poverty, abuse and neglect have become an exception.

I thank all the women who lived before me, for their uncompromising spirit and unfailing courage. Their tireless efforts give me the freedom to vote and be recognized as a person. I thank women in our present time for assertively guarding the honor of women around the world. May the circle of people who recognize gender injustice grow stronger. May the voices of women continue to be prophetic and may feminine ways of knowing continue to be validated.

Vicky Van Andel is the editor of this column. Anyone who would like to contribute to this column is invited to contact her via e-mail at: vickyv@telus.net

Kid-friendly gardening

Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

Many years ago I discovered a wooden plank between the tomato and green pepper plants in our large vegetable-and-flower garden. Immediately I knew who had placed it there. When I asked my 3-year-old son, Benjamin, what the plank was for, he answered, "It's for the birds to stand on." Days later Benjamin was digging in the garden for "chickmunks," which he believed lived underground. He placed more boards around the edges of the garden to keep these small animals from running away once he had dug them up.

I learned early on what Marjorie Harris means in *Eco-logical Gardening: Your Path to a Healthy Garden*: "If you want to live in your garden in harmony with others, you'll have to let the children in" (Random House, Toronto, 1991, pp. 168). When you let the children into your garden, they'll reap joyful benefits along with you.

Gardening provides emotional restoration. Gardening columnist Anne Marie Van Nest note that "just looking at trees and plants reduces stress, lowers blood pressure and relieves tension in muscles." And in *Where Does Your Garden Grow?* author Mary Sullivan says, "Tending plants encourages other-centered thoughts, rather than self-centered thoughts..." (Potentials Development for Health and Aging Services, Inc., 1980, pp. 2). Add to that the physical activity that gardening requires, and you have a recipe for childhood well-being in a day when many kids are sedentary, overweight, and experiencing stress because of cultural pressure to be more and desire more.

Witnessing garden

Many opportunities to tell our kids about God the Creator present themselves when we garden together. Daffodil bulbs, which produce brilliant yellow trumpet-flowers, sound forth God's praise. Iris tubers, seemingly dead, burst into purple life like royal King Jesus, dead in the grave but then risen and ascended in glory. Orange, blue, yellow, or white butterflies fluttering among flowers remind us that God's children come in many colors, too – and are all precious to him. Clipping off dead flowers allows new flowers to bloom, just as God prunes back our spiritual deadwood so that we become more fruitful. Seeds found in dead flowers or inside vegetables and fruit promise new life and point to the omniscience of God; as the proverb says, "Anyone can count the seeds in an apple, but only God can count the apples in a seed."

As our children garden with us, they are more likely to become sensitive to the environment, understanding our dependence upon it for sustenance. When they see that vegetables grown in the garden end up on the supper table, they'll comprehend that food doesn't magically appear on supermarket shelves. When they plant, water, weed, and harvest, they'll realize that producing food requires resources, effort, and time. As they help spread a load of manure or compost over the ground, they'll learn that soil also needs to be cared for. In *Garden Crafts for Kids: 50 Great Reasons to Get Your Hands Dirty* Diane Rhoades points out that "building vitality into the soil, growing food, and understanding relationships with nature gives us an opportunity to be good land stewards" (Sterling Publishing Co., Inc., 1995, pp. 7). Christian parents want their children to be exactly that!

When God planted the garden in Eden, he "made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground – trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food" (Genesis 2:9a). Our God loves beauty and diversity; he didn't create living things for functional reasons alone. Gardening with our children helps them appreciate God's delight in brilliant orange poppies, fragrant red bee balm, vibrant

Memories

yellow primroses, lanky purple hollyhocks, and delicate pink lady's slippers. Gathering in the vegetables allows our kids to see, touch, and smell plump red tomatoes, green bell peppers, slender orange carrots, and pungent leeks. Being in the garden gives kids the chance to observe graceful monarch butterflies, podgy bumble bees, roly-poly potato bugs, and slithering earthworms. The garden is a theatre displaying God's magnificent handiwork.

Gardening also teaches patience. Kids will see that tulips don't grow to maturity in a minute, cucumber plants don't produce a crop in one hour, and raspberry bushes don't yield succulent berries within a day. Growing plants take time, and they produce in the season appointed by God. Regularly walk through the garden with your kids to observe how much plants mature within a day, a week, or a longer period of time. Share the patient joy of examining the purple coneflower's bud, its opening bloom, and its flower gone to seed, which promises more plants next year. Enjoy watching bean plants bloom and noticing the growth of tiny beans till they reach maturity and are ready to pick.

Equipping the kids

Once you've decided to welcome your children into your garden, take practical steps to make gardening enjoyable for them. Give them their own garden patch. Allow them to decide what to plant there and the pattern in which they want to organize it. Do they want to grow flowers or vegetables? Do they enjoy straight rows, or would they rather plant their seeds in a circle, square, or hexagon? If you don't have a garden, use flower pots or containers to plant seeds, bulbs, or mature plants. Stephanie Donaldson's *Step-by-Step Con-*

tainer Gardening: 50 Recipes for Creating Glorious Pots and Boxes provides many excellent, creative ideas to get you started.

Kids love water, so hand them the hose or watering can. Be prepared to get soaked now and then when they decide to water you! Allow your children to clip the heads off wilting flowers and to play with the salvageable pieces. My children have had countless hours of outdoor fun and creativity making "soup" by mixing soil, water, and wilting petals, and bringing the concoction to me to "taste."

Give your children digging tools, and allow them to dig to their hearts' content within a certain area. Earthworms, potato bugs, stones, and clumps of clay are just a few of the things they'll discover. And their imaginations will run wild as they think of the possibility of digging all the way through the earth to unknown places or of discovering treasure beneath the soil.

Allow your children to gather raspberries, harvest tomatoes, and pick cucumbers. If you're making spaghetti sauce for supper, send your kids to the garden with a mission: pick two plump tomatoes, one green pepper, three leeks, and seven basil leaves. Praise them when they get back with all the items you requested.

Letting your kids into your garden is one way of loving them. And it provides an opportunity for them to love you in return. One afternoon when I was cooking, Benjamin quietly opened the kitchen door and came inside. He placed a tiny, red, horn-shaped flower on a chair, smiled at me, and left without a word. I knew that his garden gift meant, "I love you, Mom."

New shoes

Every spring when I was a kid my mom bought me a new pair of shoes. It was an annual event that I happily anticipated. We would stand together in front of the plate glass windows of S. Magder & Son Dry Goods Store and admire the new season's selection. By the time we actually went in I already had a good idea of which pair I wanted.

If I close my eyes I can still remember the smell of new fabric that greeted anyone entering the store. It was a fascinating place, crowded with all manner of "dry goods," exactly as promised by the shiny black sign with white lettering on the front of the building. As I recall, the centre aisle was wide enough to walk easily from the front of the store to the back, but all the other aisles were so narrow a person needed to turn sideways to get through. You never went down an aisle where someone else was already standing because you couldn't get past each other.

On one side of the store were shelves upon shelves of yard goods in every conceivable color, texture and pattern. Then came racks of sewing patterns, needles, threads, zippers, buttons, seam-binding, anything a seamstress would need. The other side overflowed with work wear — coveralls, jackets, rubber boots, long johns, and thermal underwear. Discreetly tucked into a back corner was the women's department where one could find everything from flannel nightgowns to "foundation" garments for women of all shapes and sizes.

Along the side wall by the fabrics was a wide counter with a measuring line running along its edge. It was here the yard goods were laid out and cut. At one end of the counter a large ball of twine dangled from the ceiling, right above a big roll of brown wrapping paper. At the other end stood an old fashioned cash register — the kind with black and white numbers that snapped loudly into the window at the top of the till. A bell rang when the cash drawer popped open. I never understood why it had to be so noisy, but it fascinated me all the same.

My favorite part of the store was the back room, where boxes of "quality footwear for men, women and children" were stacked literally from floor to ceiling.

Sammy Magder was a small Jewish man (a rarity in our little town), with a ruffle of grey hair fringing his otherwise bald head. He had a gregarious smile and welcomed each customer by name. He knew every nook and cranny of that crammed store, and it seemed that whatever you asked for, he could produce it within minutes. His son, Jack, worked with him. His hair was darker than his dad's, but their hairstyle was the same. He was soft-spoken and polite, almost shy compared to his father.

My mother preferred to deal with Sammy. He was chattier than his son. I would plunk myself down onto the wooden chair jammed in between the shoeboxes and pull off my old shoes. Sammy would peer over his wire-rimmed specs, eyeball my feet, and ask me which style I liked. Then, like magic, he would pull exactly the right pair out of the stack of boxes without having to check twice.

Intangible Things

Heidi VanderSlikke

Personally, I liked it when Jack waited on us because he spent time actually measuring my feet. Then he would wring his hands and stare at the stacks. He always opened up a bunch of boxes before he found the right ones and that way I got to see more of what was available. Sometimes we accidentally discovered a pair I liked better than the ones I had in mind.

I usually convinced my mom to let me wear the new shoes home from the store. Jack put the old beat up shoes into the box, wrapped it with brown paper and neatly tied it up, while Sammy counted out my mother's change and congratulated her on a wise purchase.

As we stepped out onto the sidewalk I felt like a colt released from the barn for the first time, ready to take on the world. My new shoes made me feel light on my feet; the heaviness of winter disappeared just looking at them. And somehow, more than that, they held the prospect of adventures yet to be lived, of steps still to be taken.

Times have changed. I don't know of any stores nearly as interesting as Sammy Magder's. And I hate shopping for shoes. My left foot is slightly larger than my right, making it hard to find a pair that feels comfortable on both feet. I'm tall, so I don't want high heels. (Besides, I'm a little klutzy and heels could be downright dangerous.) I'm picky about quality and color. And I must have the most common shoe size in the world, because when I do find a suitable style, the clerk usually returns from the stockroom empty handed, apologizing that they are "sold out of that size."

The other day I wandered through the mall, growing more discouraged with every shoe store I visited. I was heading home without success when I remembered a store I'd found winter boots in last year. In no time I spotted the perfect pair of shoes. I tugged the box out of a pile that would have made old Sammy proud. Imagine my delight when I slipped the shoes on and they felt as if they had been made especially for me. I almost asked the clerk to let me wear them out of the store.

I drove home with the car window open, the tantalizing promise of spring in the air. The closer I got to home, the more snow there was on the ground. Even so, as I closed the garage door, I noticed the robin's evening song, a sure sign of warmer days ahead. Once inside the house I eagerly flipped open the shoebox and admired my purchase.

You can't bring back the "good old days." But it's nice to know that a new pair of shoes can still spark happy memories. And as for spring, well, like those shoes, it deserves to be appreciated for its own beauty, but beyond that, for the excitement of its potential — a brand new season, with unimagined blessings yet to be experienced. Enjoy!



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History

Castle District Panorama from Calvinist to St Elizabeths Churches



Warmth from stone churches

Experiences of the church in Eastern Europe

Frank Sawyer

"The project of bringing heaven down to earth always results in bringing hell up from below."

Lesslie Newbigin

Church and society as a question

In Central and Eastern Europe the traditional stone churches are found in almost every village. They are often very cold in the winter. So people dress up with layers of clothing in order to be able to sit in cold or even freezing churches. A common alternative during the winter is to hold the worship service in a congregational meeting room ("prayer rooms"), which can be more readily heated.

How warm are stone churches? I now ask this not referring to the temperature, but to the role of the church in individual lives and in society. What has been the role of the church during times of freedom and times of war, times of tyranny, and times of opportunity? The experience of the church in Europe includes the legacy of Hitler and Stalin. During times of peace and times of social turmoil, religion can be used for good or bad. The Hungarian poet, Kanyadi, who lived through the communist decades in Romania, wrote:

churches bridges factories houses
their bombs devastate what they have built
races languages kill each other
there's not a trace of loving kindness
humility or a sense of guilt

when they praise you and say their prayers
they want your help for tomorrow's crime

Communist icons and the gulag

When the communists came to power in Russia in 1917 they began an anti-Christian political program that quickly led to the execution of thousands of priests, the closing of monasteries and the seizure of church treasures and properties. It is estimated that more than 8,000 priests, monks and nuns, were killed in 1922. When Stalin (1879-1953) collectivized farmlands in 1929 and also took over farm equipment and crops, many farmers burned their crops in protest. An estimated million families were sent into exile by Stalin, with more to follow.

Prompted by suspicion, fear, jealousy, and fanaticism (also known as idolatry), Stalin would eventually have even faithful members of the communist party imprisoned and killed. Later, however, because the church was helpful during World War II, Stalin permitted thousands (perhaps 20,000) of churches to reopen and gave them more freedom to run monasteries and theological seminaries.

But Khrushchev (1894-1971) closed down two-thirds of

the churches again. So it is estimated that while there were more than 50,000 clergy in 1914, by 1988 hardly 7,000 could be found. (Yet we know from the persecution at the time of Elijah that God shall always have '7,000' who are faithful.)

"The sinews of peace" & "The river of time"

In his famous "iron curtain" speech on March 5, 1946, Winston Churchill said at Fulton, Missouri:

...an iron curtain has descended across the Continent. Behind that line lie all the capitals of the ancient states of Central and Eastern Europe. Warsaw, Berlin, Prague, Vienna, Budapest, Belgrade, Bucharest and Sofia, all these famous cities and the populations around them lie in what I must call the Soviet sphere...an increasing measure of control from Moscow.

To live behind the iron curtain would mean persecution and abolition of many freedoms. Finally, by the time of Gorbachev the signs of a new era were in sight. Already in the millennial year for Russian Christianity (1988) Gorbachev was showing a new flexibility, and the long dreamed of return to personal rights and freedoms was on its way with 'perestroika'. Thus, forty-six years after Winston Churchill's speech on *The Sinews of Peace*, Mihail Gorbachev also spoke at Fulton, on *The River of Time*, about future global progress after the end of the Cold War. Meanwhile, now after the turn of the new millennium we know that there is no real new world order but rather a new arrangement of the disorder.

Why and how did the church suffer in Eastern Europe?

It is obvious why there was a clash between communist states and their churches:

1. Marx, Lenin and Stalin declared their communist ideology officially atheist. This resulted in a tremendous effort to push back the influence of the church.

2. Communism was materialist in two ways: first, because it held to a materialist idea of the cosmos (that is, without a divine source); and second, because it held to an economic understanding of history, which determines social values.

3. There is reason the communists could not tolerate the church. They did not tolerate freedom of speech, freedom of association, and freedom for independent social organizations. Thus there could be no freedom for Christian organizations: no freedom for Christian schools (these were closed, that is, placed under the jurisdiction of the government). There was no freedom for neighborhood Bible studies and certainly no freedom for discussions about social-political issues. A centralized society does not allow other sections of society to have a mind of their own.

4. But we may also say that as prophetic carrier of the word of God the church was correctly perceived as a threat to the idolatry of state and party fanaticism. The church has the calling to be the conscience of society – to remind people of spiritual and moral values, including justice and freedom – and this was a direct challenge to an atheist and dictatorial doctrine as practiced by Communism.

So the communist parties all across Eastern Europe promoted what people in Hungary call a 'salami policy'. That is, the centralized party sliced off more and more segments of society and placed these under their party and state control. By dividing people and parts of society against each other in a climate of suspicion and fear of punishments the communists built a totalitarian regime. The grand irony is that Marx said the state would gradually wither away in future socialist society, whereas the state apparatus became extremely over-dominating.

When we first arrived in Hungary in 1992, we met people of the older generation who could tell first-hand stories of the communist times. Things similar to what we had read in the writings of Solzhenitsyn were also told by people we met in Hungary, Ukraine and Romania. We met elderly pastors from Ukraine who had spent years in work camps, some as far away as Siberia. We met a colleague in Romania whose father had been placed in a psychiatric hospital and kept drugged because he had said that Communism was not improving society as it promised to do.

A Lutheran bishop was sent to prison because he defended the right of the church to keep control of the Lutheran church school in Budapest. The communist government solved the Christian school question by turning them into state schools. Right after the Second World War, the Roman Catholic and Reformed churches operated 6,500 schools across Hungary, but all but a token few were taken away by the communist government. The seminary where we teach was closed in 1951 and only again reopened in 1991.

How did the church suffer in Hungary? Outwardly, it lost lands and some buildings. But worse, the church was pushed back out of public life into the retreat of its own walls. And even there it was neither free nor safe, for informers would report if a sermon or other church activities showed any hint of not supporting the communist state and society. Church influence was kept out of the newspapers (except for bad press), and churches had no access to radio or television, and they were forbidden to hold public or even private Bible studies in homes. Almost all activities that could influence 'the laity' were forbidden.

Catechism classes were restricted to a few weeks between Christmas and Easter, and were only allowed for those making a profession of faith. And parents were pressured not to involve their children in church instruction. Children who were involved with the church would be teased at

History

Reformed Church of Debrecen



school or receive bad marks. To baptize one's child might lead to complaints by a neighbor, police questioning, a demotion at work, and a bad report card for the other children at school.

As a result, mainly the elderly women went to church since they had no jobs, no status, no honor and no money to lose. As a Hungarian pastor said in a wonderful sermon not long ago: the communists reasoned among themselves that since there were only old grandmothers in church, the church would die out in a generation. But forty years later, the pastor said, the church still had lots of grandmothers.

In the early 1990s we asked our students, who had grown up under Communism, what Christian influence there had been on their lives. Quite a few said that it came especially from their grandmothers. Grandmothers attended church worship, participated in diaconal projects, and looked after the children while the mothers were at work. God has his home missionaries in every generation.

However, there was a climate of fear and suspicion, for one never knew who was informing against their own neighbors or colleagues, and whether the information was a lie. Why would someone inform against another? Sometimes out of jealousy, revenge and the like, but also to gain status and special privileges for oneself with the socialist authorities. For example, people needed a special permit to travel across any border. This was difficult to obtain, and friendship with the authorities could help pave the way. The same can be said for job promotions, or some extra rations for basic living supplies. Under Communism there were problems with supply and demand; for there was mainly demand without much supply.

The choices for the church and honest citizens

In his recent book on *Our Endangered Values*, former USA president, Jimmy Carter, tells the story of a visit he had with the communist head of state for Poland toward the end of the 1970s. Carter says that the Polish head of state was torn between the faith of his mother, who was a devout Roman Catholic, and his political identity as a loyal communist. Carter says: "I felt that privately he was a Christian, but publicly an atheist." The choices for Christians and for the church – and indeed for any honest citizen – were not easy ones during the decades of Communism.

A person could speak out. The results would be to 'disappear', that is: be sent to a psychiatric ward, imprisoned, tortured, sent to Siberia, etc. There was also the possibility of violent resistance. This did not succeed, as in the case of the Hungarian rebellion in 1956. One could not easily flee across borders, for these were barricaded with barbed wire and police dogs – not to keep people out, but to keep them in. Or one could lay low, and survive, but honest citizens would also be challenged by their own conscience: can we do nothing about the sham policies of pretending to be progressing towards true socialism? Or one could collaborate with the ideological idolatry. Christians and all citizens were confronted with ethical choices concerning civic duties and Christian freedoms.

The spiritual temptation of that time was to free oneself from psychological and material pressures and receive some

rewards by collaborating. Even some church leaders developed the idea that the church as the Servant Church, should serve the socialist state and collaborate with communist goals. This is not much different than the church today collaborating with the zealous nationalism in various movements around the world. Would the church remain the church? The church under communism was a church "carrying the cross". This expression has been used at various times in the history of the church when it suffered persecutions and martyrdoms.

Quiet forms of witness

Various voices also reminded Eastern Europe of the call of Christ. Consider an illustration from the heart of Moscow: Pasternak's novel, *Dr. Zhivago*. It is remembered for the dramatic film in the west, but the book and the film were not allowed in Russia until the early 1990s. Consider the following quotation of one of the voices in the novel:

...you can't make [cultural and scientific] discoveries without spiritual equipment.

And the basic elements of this equipment are in the Gospels. What are they? ... love of one's neighbor, ...the idea of free personality and the idea of life as sacrifice....It was not until after the coming of Christ that time and humanity could breathe freely.

You can imagine this was not acceptable literature to the Communists. And in his poems Pasternak also irritated the official materialist-atheist doctrine by writing about Christmas, Holy Week, and the parables of Christ. In a final poem in the collection, Pasternak suggests that Christ is the judge of history – and therefore the judge of the twentieth century, including the judge over Fascism, Communism, and Capitalism. In the final poem, Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane says the following:

I shall descend into my grave.

And on the third day rise again.

And, even as rafts float down a river,

So shall the centuries drift, trailing like a caravan,

Coming for judgment, out of the dark, to me.

The centuries, like barges floating down the river – a final picture of Gorbachev's 'river of time' – are to be judged by Christ. We learn a lot about history from the church in Eastern Europe. And the church in Eastern Europe went through the painful experience of learning that its highest banner is not political power nor cultural prestige. Nor could its highest banner be evangelistic rallies, which were forbidden. Nor could it rely on Christian schools (which were taken away) nor on numerous other outreaches in society (which were forbidden). It was sent back to its sources and resources of faith: the Bible could still be read privately (though it was basically "out of print" – Bibles were smuggled in during these years). People could still privately share their faith. There was still an opportunity for some pastoral care. Even though diaconal organizations and social homes were taken away from the church, there were still some local signs of care among people. The Psalms and hymns – which tell of the judgment of God in history and the hope of the good

news for people in an oppressive situation – could still be sung by a "remnant" (for example the grandmothers). This was a difficult time, but perhaps also a purifying experience for the church.

There are certainly many variations in the many Central and East European nations. Changes after the communist era also depend on the pre-communist history of a particular nation and culture. For example, pre-communist Russia was not a modern democracy when Communism arrived there in 1917. It cannot merely return to the past, but needs to make a qualitative leap. It has a great cultural heritage, but is only now beginning the experience of modern democracy. What the church becomes today in Eastern Europe also partly depends on what the church was like in the pre-communist times. For example, the Hungarian Reformed Church in its pre-communist times already knew about the relationship of reformed theology to the idea of the Christian faith as a catalyst for social transformation.

It is an amazing story: in the west there is much talk of becoming post-Christian. First it was said that God was hidden, then that God was absence, then that God is dead. Yet religion is always present, even if in new forms, whether universal or sectarian, status quo maintaining or as a new trend setter, peaceful or terrifying. The religious question always includes John Lennon's question: "How can I go forward if I don't know which way I am facing?" That has become the question after the ideological revolution of 1989 in Eastern Europe.

Eastern Europe is no longer atheist, but post-atheist. That is, the governments no longer promote atheism. In Dostoevsky's writings in pre-communist times, when a drunk man was senselessly beating his horse, an old man in the crowd gathering around calls out: "What's wrong with you, beating an animal like that – aren't you a Christian?" There was a time in Eastern Europe when it was 'natural' to talk that way. Those times may still exist in some villages in Eastern Europe, but the globalizing tendency has already brought new challenges to people there. The church is still blinking its eyes, I think.

Theological insights underlined by the experiences in Eastern Europe

Let us now list a number of points which the church in the 'East block' and we in the west may learn from the communist times.

1. THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD. We learn that God is transcendent and not to be identified with our ideologies. We learn our own finitude, our limitations when we want to transform society. The first commandment: you shall not worship any other gods, is a safeguard against the idolatry of power and violence.

2. THE HUMAN IMAGE OF GOD. Under Communism people were not seen as image bearers of God. Communism valued abstractions: 'the workers', 'technology', 'the future society', but not people and their rights and freedoms. Today the church may bring back to the center of society the importance (as Pasternak wrote) of personal love, sacrifice, and freedom.

3. SIN IS ACTIVE IN EVERY HUMAN HEART AND LIFE, not just in the hearts of the wealthy class. It would be naïve to deny the class struggle; but the church can now in a new way proclaim justice for the poor, but within the framework of reconciliation. Christian theology has always summarized the idea of Christian freedom in Christ as freedom from sin, and freedom to serve. If only we could learn in our life practice that Christ calls rich and poor to repentance and a change of the 'creed of greed'!

Continued on page 15

Ecclesiastes

Don't curse those in power

*Do not revile the king even in your thoughts,
or curse the rich in your bedroom,
because a bird of the air may carry your words,
and a bird on the wing may report what you say.*

Ecclesiastes 10:20

A. A. van Ruler

The king and the rich in this passage are examples of people who exercise power. They both rely on power and possessions. And they can justify almost anything. They are, thus, also people with the same weaknesses, follies and vices as all human beings. So they are often guilty of misconduct. Their lives tend to excess and waste. They treat people unfairly and unjustly. They don't take others into account, brushing them aside or stepping on them.

This can fill us with outrage. And treating others dishonestly and unjustly is very bad. It is also bad when we ourselves become victims of such mistreatment. But it is sometimes just as bad to watch others become victims. We sometimes are filled with wild rage.

We must be very careful at such times, says the Preacher. So he's not trying to excuse anything. He acknowledges that the rich and the powerful often trample over others and are guilty of horrible injustice. But he points out that much of our opposition to such injustice is simply powerless in this absurd world and therefore unwise and foolish.

We are advised to be cautious even in our thoughts. Be careful about the thoughts you are nurturing. Be careful about the attitudes you develop. Even in the privacy of your own home you must be careful. Watch over the words you speak even in an intimate conversation and be careful of the judgments that you utter.

You may be moved to utter some earth-shaking curses – not just in general but curses directed at someone. In the depths of your heart you'd love to place a deep curse on the rich and the powerful: in other words, you'd like to cast them under God's judgment and wrath and see them subject to everlasting condemnation.

This is what all cursing entails at bottom, and it is true even of casual profanity. To curse is to wish eternal damnation on people and things.

Even when you are tempted to do it when you are alone with your thoughts or in an intimate conversation you must be very careful. The birds might hear you and carry your words to the rich and the powerful. And they wouldn't have any trouble finding you.

This is, of course, a highly figurative way of putting it. A bird can't understand a word of what you say and it surely cannot tell it to anyone else. But that is irrelevant to the poetic inspiration of the Preacher. All he means to say is be careful what you say, for you never know how it will reach the ear of someone else. It will invariably leak

out. Even the walls have ears.

There is something discouraging and mean-spirited in these words. What it seems to boil down to is that nowhere in this society can you really say what's on your mind. You can't even call injustice injustice because it is dangerous. You're better off keeping your mouth shut and avoiding making judgments. You are best off simply blending in with the masses.

In every age there have been those who have found this to be intolerable. They reach for radical solutions. Let's eliminate the rich and the powerful, they say, for in a society without rulers and without classes injustice will be eliminated. These are not just thoughts they harbor in their hearts. And they don't only utter them in the privacy of their own homes. They take their ideas out into the street. They hope to do away with power and possessions with violence. Practically speaking, this has always meant that others acquire power, sometimes almost unlimited power, and they often manage to acquire quite a few possessions in the process as well.

However, this isn't the only thing that should come to mind here. We notice that the king and the rich are merely examples of all those who wield power. There are many more like them, such as those who assume leadership, those who hold key positions, and those who shape public opinion.

In our time with our enormous array of media this becomes an enormously important issue. The wind tends to blow from a specific direction. Public opinion hardens into uniformity. All voices begin to sound the same tune. Whether in the church, the state or culture the dominant ideas are foisted on us and pushed through. Think of the current events programs on television: the lonely dissenter is often bypassed and trampled underfoot.

So this is not simply a question of power and possessions. The elimination of the state and private property won't avail us much. Foolishness is seated deep in human nature and society, so deeply that no political or social revolution can help us transcend it. One person as such is unjust to another person. This may cause deep bitterness. And it can get us all wound up. Once in a while we are also tempted to vent our outrage, and then we are tempted to curse.

Don't do it, says the Preacher. He may be suggesting that to react this way to human folly is itself folly, and that in this



Study After Velazquez's Portrait of Pope Innocent X by Francis Bacon

way we add folly to folly. But then what must we do? What must we do about the folly of the rich and powerful? Aren't they guilty of injustice in their behavior? And isn't this disastrous to human society and to the world? Must we simply ignore all this? Must we passively submit to it?

In this text the Preacher only tells us what we must not do. We must not curse others, not even in private. He doesn't say in so many words what we must do. But it does sound as if we're simply to let things run their course.

Perhaps his position looks less objectionable when we note that in this respect the Preacher is very close to the gospel. What do the gospels tell us about the evil in this world? The heart of the matter is summed up in the powerful words of Paul: love endures all things, love covers all things. This is also what God did in Jesus Christ. In the cross, in his atoning sacrifice, our Mediator bore and covered all

the evil in the world. This is love itself. The offering on Golgotha is love as a divine and historical reality.

There is something objectionable, too, about the gospel, precisely as the gospel of love. Is this all there is to it – that the evils of this world are borne and covered? Must the world not also be delivered from all its evils one day?

This is the great truth of the future and of the end – the truth of the last judgment. Now we still live in the situation of the cross, that is the situation of love. Now injustice is not yet eliminated but borne and covered.

This is not to deny the reality of the policeman. Or of the judge. These must oppose injustice with everything in their power. They take the gospel further. But they cannot clear the world of all injustice. So along with justice we need love; along with the judge, the apostle; alongside the state, the church; besides the impulse toward revolution, the admonition of the Preacher to be very, very careful and patient.

APRIL 16, 2007

Christian living**Expectations**

Elizabeth over Margaret
 Will over Harry
 that's the nature of the game.
 The eldest gets the crown
 the land
 the executor position.
 Or not?

Jacob barters with hot soup for the birthright,
 a supper of field meat for the blessing,
 not what we expected.
 When he is old
 he crosses his arms to place his right
 hand of blessing on the younger son
 of Joseph.
 By then he has wrestled
 with God and knows who is in control.

And what of David
 Jesse's youngest son chosen to be king?
 A radical move.
 And Rahab
 being who she was
 or Ruth
 with that shady history of Moab.

Or me?

Our expectations expose us.
 We don't know
 very much
 about grace.

Linda Siebenga

Stone Churches....continued from page 13

4. IDEOLOGIES. We have surely learned by the 21st century that ideologies in both east and west (socialist and capitalist) **act like gods: creators and saviors**. For it is the overbearing desire for power, control, honor and possessions which turns ideological dreams into nightmares.

5. 'THE CHURCH CARRYING THE CROSS' (the suffering church), is now better able to talk about the **grace of the cross of Christ**. Not only because suffering often brings us closer to God than does success, but also because we come to understand the suffering of Christ and the power of his grace. The church carrying the cross also carries a blessing to others.

6. LIVING BY PROVIDENTIAL GRACE. The spiritual principle of death and rebirth explains why we may expect new fruit from the churches in Eastern Europe. After the death camps under Hitler and Stalin, today there are the new Christian youth camps run by churches run in many places in Eastern Europe and attended by thousands of young people. The church is a voice again on radio and television. The seminary where we teach has produced 230 pastors during the past ten years. The church in Central and Eastern Europe is learning to walk again – in freedom, and in the fear of the Lord. Let me end with a verse again from Kányádi:

*my fears my hopes don't disappear
 this is the grace that helps me stay
 this caring providential fear
 has held my hand along the way*

I trust that these voices have illustrated for you the warmth of faith coming from stone churches and their members, in Central and Eastern Europe.

Frank & Aria Sawyer have served for 24 years with Christian Reformed World Mission, first in Latin America and now Hungary. Frank has published seven books in Hungarian on the history of philosophy and on Christian ethics.

Rethinking love and intimacy: Do you feel respected and connected?

Baby boomers want the world, they want to marry for love, have hot sex and live a long time.

Jim Gibson, *The Sun*, March 26, 2007
 quoting Marty Klein

Just when I was mulling over a possible "concise description of contemporary marriage" I came across the above sensational headline in a recent local paper's Art and Life section. Who can resist reading an article with such a headline? At the same time, it was a bit misleading because Gibson reported more on the challenges of intimacy than anything else!

In the above article Marty Klein does not define 'love' because he thinks each person needs to decide what it means for him/herself. He also believes it is not whether the person *loves* you, but how that person *treats* you and suggests asking the question, "Do you feel respected and connected?" He further suggests 'intimacy' has to do with risk-taking in revealing yourself to others and to be able to tolerate some discomfort in the process. The key to achieving all this is good communication. Which brings us back full circle to the cause of 'late life divorces' – lack of communication.

Marriage – then and now

As I have mentioned before, throughout history marriage has served many different purposes such as economic alliances, procreation, convenience, status, and need for care and comfort. During the last few generations, however, people have been marrying for 'love.' And while we may define the word differently, satisfying marriages are about the *quality* of the emotional bond between spouses that comes about through challenging each other to grow.

Another way of understanding this is to be aware how spouses nurture one another on three levels. First is *basic care*, second is *emotional support* and third is *affectionate expression* both sexual and non-sexual. *Basic care* is the most fundamental form of nurturing and includes, sheltering, feeding, clothing, comforting, protecting and financial support. *Emotional support* includes giving and receiving empathy, encouragement, appreciation, time, companionship and assistance of various kinds. *Affectionate expression* includes verbal as well as physical expressions of love.

Life/experiences in detail

While it is helpful to have this framework on nurture, life is still experienced mostly in managing the details effectively. For example, one morning Jim and Joan were passionately discussing the changes in their marital and family life with the arrival of their week-old little baby. Both were pleased as punch with the little bundle of flailing arms and legs as he was insistently making himself known to his new but still dumb-founded parents. Things, however, were not settling down, because Jim and Joan had previously been able to luxuriously sleep eight uninterrupted hours per night on the weekend. Now they had to shift their needs and think in terms of how to function when they were both suffering from the new baby syndrome – a lack of sleep!

This particularly morning, Jim was listening to Joan describe in detail what she needed from him so that she would be able to deal more effectively with

Getting Unstuck

Arlene Van Hove

the change in their family life. When she finished, Jim quietly pondered what Joan so passionately told him and calmly said, "Yes, I understand what you are saying and I will work on that." She responded by saying "Thanks, I really appreciate that."

Jim and Joan's simple exchange is an example of verbal intimacy that leads to understanding one another resulting in a positive connection. Joan's suggestion about what she needed from him took emotional energy on her part in terms of her specific request. His ability to hear her need (without getting defensive by blaming or accusing her in any way) also took emotional energy but equally important was his respect for her in terms of taking her needs seriously. The exchange allowed both spouses to feel respected and connected.

The big picture

When 'life in detail' (communication) is not working well, we take comfort in staying faithful to the big picture of marital and family life. Marty Klein, however, stresses most of us marry when we are in our twenties and are still emotional adolescents who base the relationship on "I'll take care of you, you take care of me." (This brings to mind a recent Larry King interview of Halle Berry, who admitted to being suicidal when her marriage broke up because she always believed "he would take care of me.") And so, one of the tasks of marriage is to challenge one another to grow up!

This is what authors Morrie and Arleah Schechtman write about in their book *Love in the Present Tense*. They quote the following values for contemporary marriages: 1) personal growth, 2) willingness to challenge each other, 3) pre-eminence of the adult relationship, 4) dedication to life's purpose, 5) inner renewal, 6) personal responsibility, 7) accountability, 8) quality communication.

The irony is, many people consider themselves fully grown at the age of twenty-one and it never occurs to them they are suppose to be maturing as life goes on. They believe whatever emotional maturity is attained at this age is good enough for the rest of the adult life. Until recently, cultivating the inner life was not something people took seriously. A perfect example is a recent neighbour who only began looking at himself after his second marriage ended in divorce.

In summary, the contemporary marital model stresses the development of personal maturity. Our efforts to grow will result in a better marriage, however, it will also depend on whether our spouse is willing to make a reciprocal effort. If not, there is only so much one person can do. The cause of late life divorces is lack of communication. This makes sense because that is where we experience life in detail and where it becomes most painful. As we age, we only have a limited number of resources left and if our life-long hope for "respect and connection" does not seem to be forth coming, it may be best to spend the remainder of one's life alone and in an environment of peace and harmony.

Next month – What does Grace have to do with it?)

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Mission

Mbudi Za Ndokotora: out of sorrow gladness

Rob Greidanus

This past few weeks has been an emotional roller coaster in both the hospital and in the Greidanus home. As usual, there have been both joys and sorrows. Let me start with the sadness, before I share the good news.

In January a nurse's wife with severe headache in pregnancy was subsequently diagnosed with HIV and cryptococcal meningitis. Her husband was initially an obstacle to having her tested for HIV because of his concern over the stigma associated with a positive result. But by the time she was discharged, he seemed to be very supportive and was very pleased with his new healthy son and thankful that his wife was on the mend from her serious illness.

He signed on as her treatment supporter before they left the hospital. That meant he agreed to supervise her treatment and help ensure ongoing compliance of her anti-retroviral and anti-fungal medications. Tragically, he failed all of us in his supporter role. Despite being given this second chance at life, she never returned for follow-up visits and stopped taking her medicines.

Predictably she got very sick over this last month and was taken to hospital comatose and in critical condition. However, this time it was too late for medicine to make a difference. She died within hours of being admitted to hospital.

No explanation was given by her husband, an educated nurse, as to why she defaulted on her medical treatment which had previously helped her so much. All of us involved in her care were deeply troubled to hear of her passing. We had fought so hard to save her and her baby just two months prior, and now all that effort seemed insignificant. It reminded me once again of all the hidden and inexplicable barriers to effective HIV treatment in Africa.

Recently, our hospital has started doing PCR testing on babies of mothers infected with HIV. This test gives us a definitive answer early on about whether the baby has acquired HIV from his mother. In the past, the Elisa antibody test was done. It often tested falsely positive (because of the mother's antibodies) for up to 18 months of age. Therefore, we would usually test the baby at 6, 9, 12, and 18 months to see if a positive test would become negative over time. It caused a lot of anxiety in mothers waiting and hoping for a negative result for their child.

So, now I consider it a great joy to share a definitively negative result at the tender age of 2 months and watch tears of joy and gratitude run down the mother's face when she receives this good news. Conversely, it breaks my heart when I have to share the bad news of a positive HIV test in a 6 week old child.

This past week I had to tell two mothers that their 2 month old infants tested positive for HIV. Their reactions were quite similar. Both tried to be stoic and not show any emotion, but you could still read the pain and disappointment on their faces. As I coun-

seled them about the results, I found out a bit more about their family situation.

One of their stories is symbolic of the HIV tragedy throughout Africa and I would like to share it with you. This particular mother was well kept and more educated than the average woman in Rundu. She spoke English well and openly shared the drama that transpired in her home over the preceding months.

She agreed to have an HIV test early in the pregnancy when it was offered during her first antenatal visit. The result came back negative. As is typically done here during post test counseling, she was advised to have another test three months later if her situation warranted it. She was married and faithful to her husband, but had doubts about her husband's fidelity.

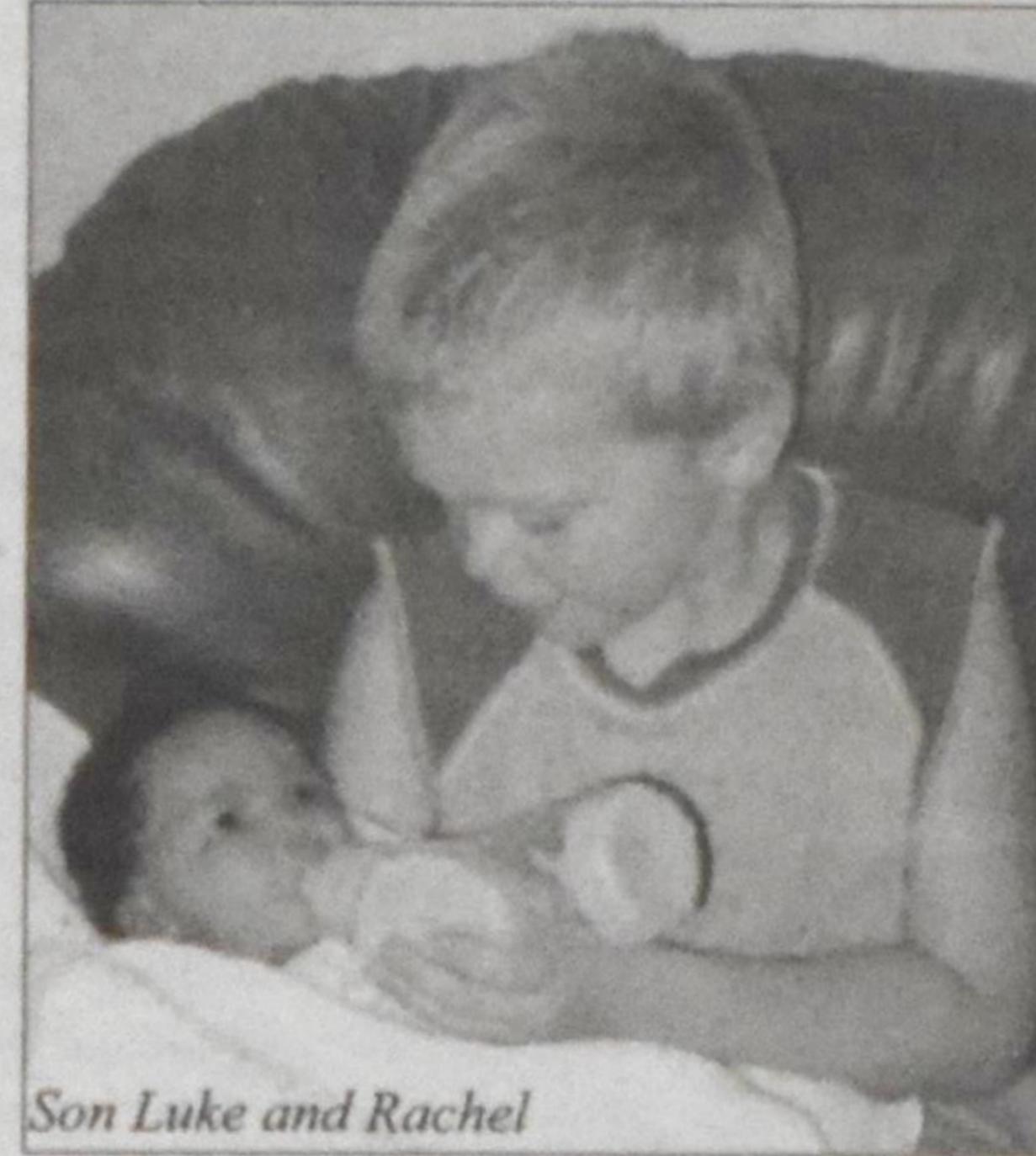
In this culture, it is very common for men to have many sexual partners even when they are 'married' to just one woman. The women seem almost powerless to do anything about it. I have heard many accounts of women who knew their husbands were promiscuous but if they tried to confront them on this they would either get beaten up by them or left deserted. In this culture, a woman is very dependent on her husband for status and finances. So sadly, many men take advantage of this situation and leave their wives in a very vulnerable state.

Often the women just resign themselves to the fact that this is how married life will be. Some try to at least protect themselves and insist on condoms when they are with their husbands. Unfortunately, this usually doesn't go over well with their men and in most cases they simply refuse to wear them. If the wife stands her ground and refuses to be intimate with him, he will usually walk out the door and go to the home of his other 'girl friend'.

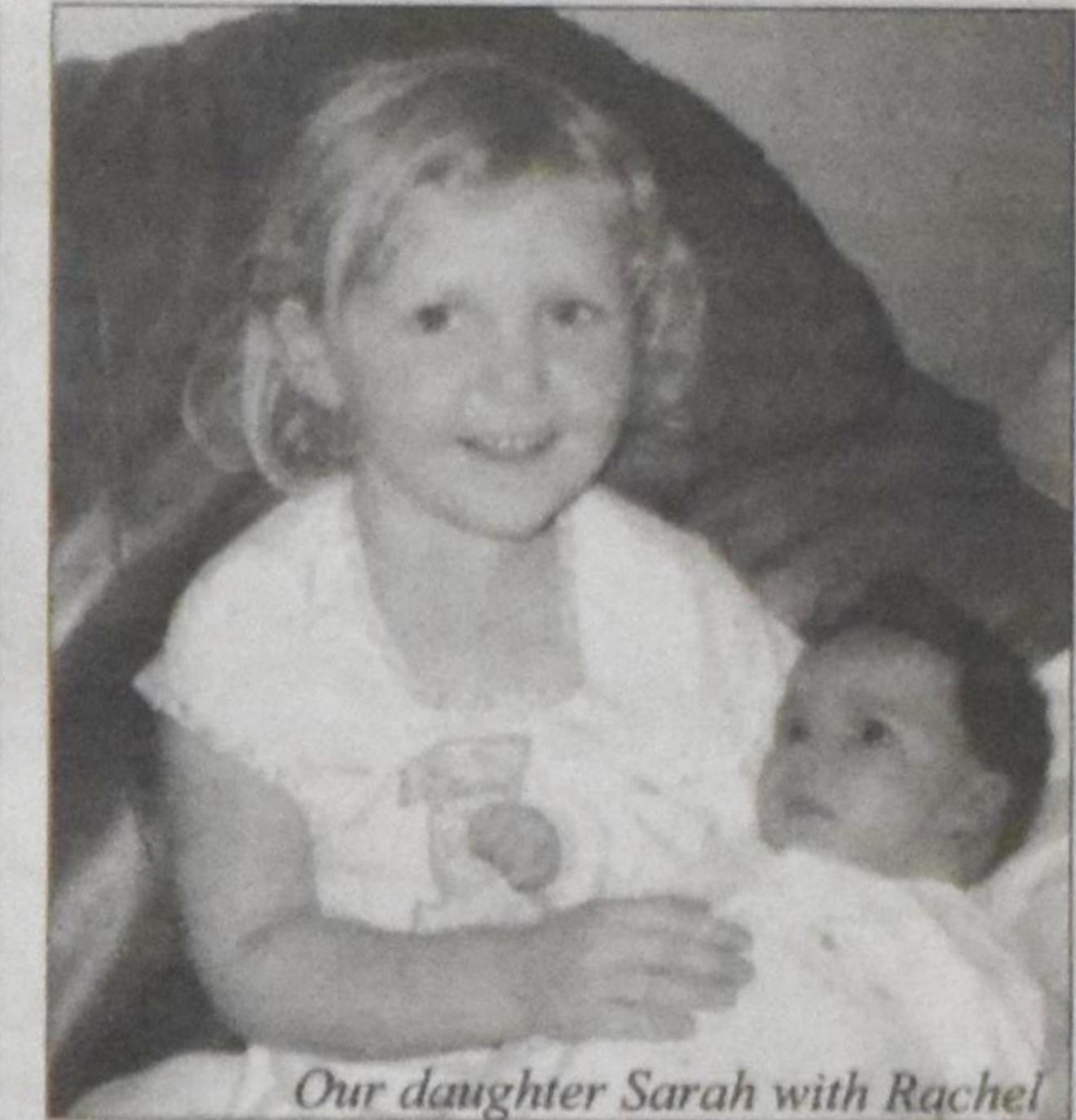
Hearing stories like this time and time again has been really wearing me down lately. I am trying hard not to develop bitterness towards the men of this culture but at times trying to get them to change their ways seems like an exercise in futility. However, it is never without hope, so I will keep trying to educate and counsel where I can. I will keep praying for transformation in this culture – especially for the men and their view on the sacredness of the marriage union and their role in the home.

Sorry for the interlude – now back to this lady's story. She was suspicious of her husband's infidelity, but to make matters worse, he walked out on her halfway through the pregnancy. She has not seen him since, but suspects he has gone to Angola with another girlfriend. Wisely, she decided to go for a repeat HIV test late in the pregnancy.

She was not that surprised, but visibly disappointed to find out the result had now become positive. This meant she was infected with HIV by her husband during the pregnancy and this placed her and the baby in a high risk situation. During the



Son Luke and Rachel



Our daughter Sarah with Rachel

acute phase of HIV infection the viral load is particularly high, making the chance that the virus will cross the placenta and infect baby higher than usual.

This mother did all she could to lower the risk. She took anti-retrovirals during labor and the baby received the same after delivery. She spent what little money she had on formula to eliminate the small risk of passing the virus through her breast milk. Tragically, despite all of this, her baby was infected with HIV. She will now face an uncertain future for both her and her new baby.

Now I want to tell you a story that starts with tragedy but ends with joy. On March 5, a young San lady (Bushmen tribe) entered our maternity ward in labor. She came from a very remote area about 100 km away from Rundu. Like many from her tribe, she did not know her age, had little education, and was financially poor. She had one older child from a previous relationship that was delivered by Caesarian Section a few years prior. She stood less than 5 feet tall but was stoic in early labor and appeared to be progressing well.

When assessed by my colleague, she was felt to be a reasonable candidate for a trial of labor and so was observed on the ward. Later in the day it became obvious that her cervix was not dilating any further, and that she had features of CPD (her pelvis was too small in proportion to the baby's head). My colleague on call for that day made urgent arrangements for a Caesarian delivery. A beautiful girl was delivered weighing 2.88 kg.

As it would come to pass, I was not closely involved in the care of this mother post operatively. I do recall seeing her on rounds a couple of days later. She smiled pleasantly and appeared to have no complaints. However, on March 9 things mysteriously took a turn for the worse. Suddenly she developed a fever, increasing pain, and abdominal distension. I was off duty that day; leading a workshop at the church we are involved with. However, my colleagues assessed her and feared that she was developing intra-abdominal sepsis. They took her to the operating room that afternoon and found an abdomen full of pus. The source of her infection is still not entirely clear, but it was

very aggressive and life threatening. My colleagues did what they could and vigorously cleaned the abdomen, placed appropriate drains and put her on strong broad spectrum antibiotics. Sadly, she died later that same night from overwhelming sepsis.

What normally happens in cases like this is that the immediate family comes to inquire about the untimely death, obtains the required death certificate, and takes the body for burial. Usually extended family from the mother's side will take the baby and care for it. However, this case was entirely different.

Day after day went by and no family came for either the baby or to claim her mother for burial. This infant was therefore given a temporary home on the maternity ward where the nurses would take turns feeding her and looking after her. After several days, a friend of the deceased mother stopped by. She was sent to bring what family there was into the hospital and make decisions about burial and care for the baby.

Two weeks went by and still there was no sign of family. After almost 3 weeks the father finally appeared. He talked with the nurses and displayed sorrow for the loss of his wife. He held this infant briefly and then told the nurses that he could not afford to care for her. He also said there was no living family members on his or his wife's side that could afford to feed her. He kindly asked the nurses if they would look after her for a year or two. Then, he went on his way back to his rural home.

Over these last three weeks, I would see this precious child each day on my rounds on the Maternity Ward. Each day my heart would grow softer for her and even more concerned for her well-being. I would ask myself, how could no one claim this precious gift of life? I shared the story with Alisa and we prayed that God would provide a loving home for her. And then, in answer to our prayers, God spoke to our hearts. We both felt convicted that this child was meant to be part of our family. But would it be possible? Would it be permitted?

So when she was 3 weeks old, we approached the hospital social worker to express our interest in caring for her. To

Pastoral Excellence

Smaller churches measure up big

Celebrating the smaller church (Part 2)

Rachel Boehm Van Harmelen

Do smaller churches measure up? "Often, size becomes a major diagnostic tool for churches," says Rev. Paul Van Dyken, pastor of Grace Christian Reformed Church in Burke, Vermont. "People think that if you're not big, you're not healthy."

When Van Dyken and some of his peers decided to form a group to study how to lead smaller churches to health, it wasn't hard to find pastors to join. Almost all of the CRC congregations in Van Dyken's region are considered "small." Van Dyken's congregation, for instance, has fewer than 180 members.

As smaller-church pastors, Van Dyken says he and his peers already understood that size was not the way to measure success. "But part of our goal was to help our congregations understand that as well," he says.

Size is relative

The local CRC in Edson-Peers, Alberta, has been in existence for more than 50 years and has a membership of 186. Edson-Peers' pastor Paul Van Stralen agrees that smaller churches often mistakenly use size to measure how well they are doing. But size is relative, warns Van Stralen. "Though we are a small church, we're also in a small community of just over 9,000. In comparison with the 10 or so other churches in town, we are among the largest," he says.

Still, in the context of the broader CRC community, Van Stralen doesn't apologize for his church's comparatively small size. "There is the notion that if we were larger, we'd be able to do more things, but all in all we are doing quite well."

"There is a strong sense of community in our church," he says. "New members feel welcome and included. We have an unusually large percentage of members that volunteer, and nearly every member is involved in a Bible study, a committee, or a church program."

Alternate measures

"When churches focus on whether they're fulfilling their mission, there is a sense that's it's not about grow-

ing larger but about being faithful," Van Dyken says. His smaller-church peer group looked at how having a strong sense of mission provides opportunities to evaluate church health using measures other than size.

Smaller churches may not have as many resources as their larger counterparts, but they're still doing God's work, points out Rev. David Tigchelaar, who serves Hebron CRC, in Renfrew, Ontario – membership 199. "We should focus on how we're using our gifts for God's glory," says Tigchelaar. "And if we're doing that the best that we can."

Attracted to small

Smaller can be good, says Rev. David Vroege, pastor of All Nations CRC in Halifax, Nova Scotia, an active inner-city church with 128 members. Vroege says some people simply prefer small in many areas of their lives. "For instance, some people prefer the small, local corner store to the super-size grocery stores. So maybe small churches appeal to people, too."

In addition, the smaller size of a congregation can make it easier to quickly enfold newcomers and allow them to use their gifts, adds Tigchelaar. "I think of a young woman in our church who just recently arrived and is already using her gifts in the GEMs (Girls Club) program. Small churches give people a place."

Moreover, it's easier for the leaders in a smaller church to stay connected to their members, says Van Stralen. "We have a smaller council with smaller districts," he says. "As a pastor of a small church, I am able to know all my members and even develop relationships with them."

Bigger isn't always better

Through the course of their studies, the smaller-church pastors in Van Dyken's peer group concluded that bigger is not always better. "One of the things that surprised us the most was the level of health in the smaller congregations represented in our peer group," says Van Dyken. "All of us have struggles but, for the most part, our congregations are fairly healthy. We don't have to be big, and we're OK with that."

Mbudi Za Ndokotora...continued from page 16

our surprise, she welcomed our concern, and started to look into the family situation further. The social worker even went to the extent of driving out into 'the bush' to find the extended family and see what other options were available for this abandoned child. She brought the father back to the hospital for some more dialogue to assist us on how we could proceed.

I had the opportunity to meet the father during his visit to hospital. He was poorly nourished and simply dressed. He was soft spoken and gracious. Through a translator he once again explained that he did not have the means to care for this girl, but said he would appreciate it if we would take her into our home. He permitted me to take his picture. Then we shook hands and said farewell. His parting words were; "Thank you doctor, God bless you".

So on March 27, 2007, the social worker gave us permission to take this little girl into our home. She is preparing legal documents that will give us temporary authorization to care for her in a 'place of safety'. She is optimistic that we will be able to adopt her as our own in the near future. However, we are a little guarded, as this can be a long and painful process in Namibia. She asked us what name we wanted her to have on the documents she was preparing. We stood speechless, and said

we would need some time to reflect on that. She then told us that the father had given her one name before he returned to his home. That name was Ndapewa, which in the tribal language means 'given'.

So with tears in our eyes and elation in our hearts, we brought this gift home. Our entire family has received her with great joy and thanksgiving. The children have already made her their much loved baby sister. They all fight over who gets to hold her and bottle feed her. In essence, we all simply adore her. Even before the first letter could be typed on the official documents, we have adopted her in our hearts. We have since expanded her names to Rachel Grace Ndapewa. God willing, we look forward to adding Greidanus to the end of that list of names in the very near future. That is our hope and our prayer.

We acknowledge the tremendous misfortune it was for Rachel to lose her mother and we are deeply saddened by this loss. However, the sorrow has since been eclipsed by the inexpressible joy that our new daughter has brought into our home. We praise God for this wonderful gift, Ndapewa, 'given' by his grace.

With gratitude and gladness,
Ndokotora Rob



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Reflections

From the 11th Province

Marian Van Til

Winter got off to a late start where I live. "Where I live" is western New York State – which I jokingly refer to in the heading of my monthly column as "the 11th Province." My husband and I live in the Niagara Peninsula a few hundred yards from the Niagara River, the Canada-U.S. border. This area, dotted with orchards and vineyards and much other greenery, lies in plant hardiness Zone 6, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. It is the only part of New York State in a zone that "mild": the lowest temperatures get down to about -5 degrees Fahrenheit (and that rarely happens, though it hits zero now and then). Across the river on the Canadian side (which I can see from my office window) is also called Zone 6 by Agriculture Canada, though I'm told that not all of the American and Canadian hardiness zones correspond.

All through November and December it was mild – "unseasonably warm" as they say. Lawns stayed lush, and the Sweet Williams in our window boxes also remained pleasantly green. Then about mid-January it snowed; and snowed, and snowed again; and again. It stayed cold (yes, it reached zero Fahrenheit a few times, with a much colder wind chill). So the snow piled up; and up. The very last snow patch – a vestige of the six-foot pile at the end of our driveway – disappeared only a few weeks ago.

As such a winter seems to wear on and on, it makes one think of, then long for, then anticipate spring. That anticipation is aided by signs, ever so slowly evident, that spring is indeed coming. Are the crocuses on Lewiston hill out yet? Have the stems of the daffodils planted in a hundred random locations by all the local municipalities emerged? Is there any sign of the tulips? Thinking of tulips makes me wonder whether the new tulip bulbs I planted last fall – around our mailbox, at the front of beds near the house and in several other spots in the front yard – survived the industrious and ever hungry squirrels. (Yes, it's starting to look as if at least some of those bulbs eluded being squirrels' lunch.)

Those are only the most blatant signs of spring-a-coming. The River with its tree-lined shores, still stark and leafless, is the most fascinating harbinger of spring. Gradually the last of the accumulated shore-ice melts away. The final swift-moving chunks of mid-river ice sail by toward Lake Ontario a mile down. I wonder to myself if those ice chunks were birthed by the Falls, upriver, where they might have hung solidly through the winter, now finally breaking off and sweeping downstream. Even the current and water color seem to change day by day, even hour by hour with every fluctuation in temperature and wind; and of course, with the emerging new season.

There are dozens of species of trees along the shores, deciduous and evergreen, tall, shrubby and in-between, and when they have leafed out they will display a gleeful variety of greens and yellows. There will be wild flowers too, in spots. And there are animals: fish and frogs of who-knows-what-kinds, and the insects they and the birds feed on. Lots of birds – waterfowl, song birds and occasional raptors. And, finally, there are the creatures that are, post-Fall, more reluctant to show themselves to us human beings: species of mice and voles and snakes, woodchucks (as we native Midwesterners call ground hogs), possums, foxes, raccoons, and the odd cat (one of which now lives with us in a style she could never have dreamed of as a starving, wounded young stray).

As long as the earth endures

Where you live you may experience these or other

'This is my Father's world'

signs of God's faithfulness to his creation, repeated annually. We know we can rely on seeing these signs over and over. Each year they're the same, but not quite; there always seem to be fresh and subtle variations.

This spring when I walk or drive along the River, or stand on our backyard deck surveying our own small pond, the emerging perennial beds and the two dwarf peach trees (leaf-buds just now popping), I will be prompted (by the Spirit, I think) to recall the same thing I did last year: I will remember God's promise to Noah, and us, after the flood: "As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease" (Gen. 8:22).

I hope spring will prompt you to do the same. The yearly cycle of the four seasons, but especially the annual metamorphosis from winter to spring, is a most fundamental sign that God has been faithful to that promise and will remain so.

According to God himself through the prophet Jeremiah, we who rely on his faithfulness should "say to themselves": "Let us fear the LORD our God, who gives autumn and spring rains in season, who assures us of the regular weeks of harvest" (Jer. 5:24).

It seems hard to fathom, after all God had done for his people, that the Israelites forgot (again and again) that their covenant God was, and is, the God of the spring rains and harvest bounty, the God who says, "Every animal of the forest is mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills" (Ps. 50:1), the God who is all-powerful and ever-faithful. If God claims all those created things and seasonal processes as his, how much more can he lay claim to us whom he created in his own image!

In the prophet Hosea's time (mid-eighth century B.C., which the NIV Study Bible notes call "the tragic final days of the northern kingdom"), the Israelites thought perhaps they should turn back to the LORD. But not because they were truly repentant. Rather, they wanted to escape further judgment. They said, "Let us acknowledge the LORD; let us press on to acknowledge him. As surely as the sun rises, he will appear; he will come to us like the winter rains, like the spring rains that water the earth" (Hosea 6:3).

That sounds good, but it's phony. They think they're going to, and deserve to, get off easy. But unlike the immense and steadfast love of God for them (and all of his creation), their own love for God is ephemeral. God says as much: "Your love is like the morning mist, [Ephraim and Judah], like the early dew that disappears" (Hosea 6:4).

They do know, even if they don't quite admit it outright, that it is God the LORD – not impotent gods of wood, stone or iron – who causes the sun to rise and the winter and spring rains to come like clockwork, yet they don't want to truly change their ways, which of course first requires a change of heart. How ironic that the Israelites recognized that God had the power to heap judgement on them (and had done so), yet they couldn't bring themselves to repent and then trust God for his blessings.

Why do you worry about clothes?

Ephraim and Judah had a lot to answer for: they were idolators, even to sacrificing their own children to the gods they had adopted; they cheated foreigners – and each other – when they did business; they even bilked orphans and widows. They forgot to whom they belonged and what he had done for them. If we were to enumerate sins and name sinners (not our job, but we sometimes think God needs help in that area) we would

put ourselves in a wholly other category. Yet we know, of course, that "all [my emphasis] have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). And their Messiah for whom they longed or should have longed like far-off spring is ours, too, thanks be to God.

That Messiah once said this to his harried and worried disciples (whose living was rather precarious), and he tells us:

Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?

"And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own. (Matt. 6: 25-34)

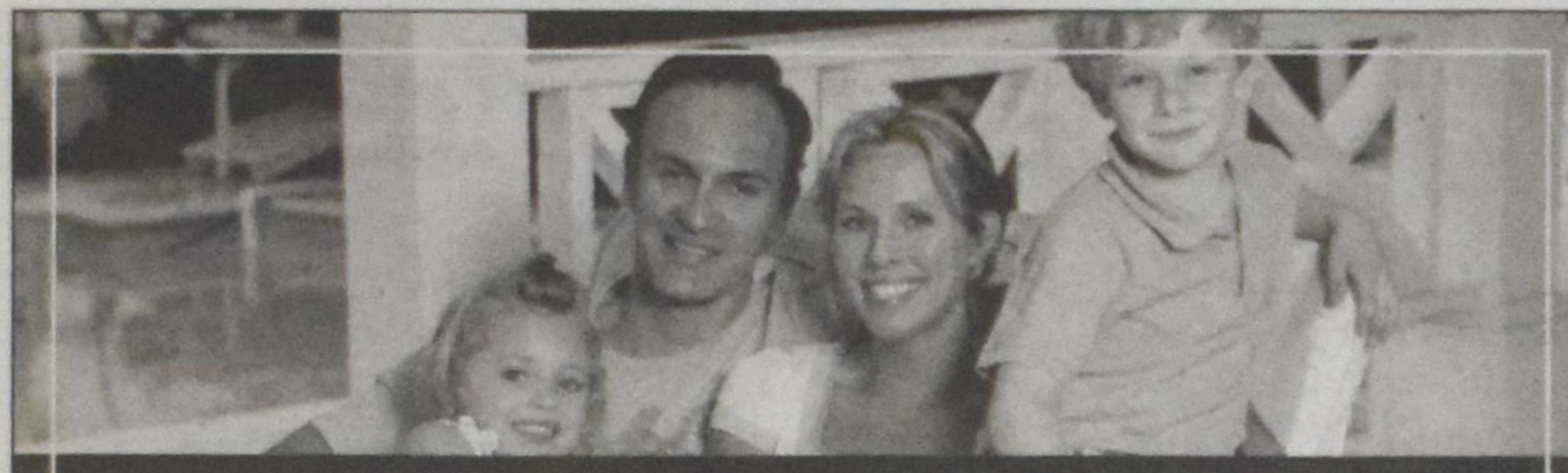
Jesus continues the theme God urged (commanded, really) through Jeremiah: rely on the God who controls the seasons and brings rain when you need it. He is the God who also cares for the birds and adorns the lilies (lilies purely for your, and his, pleasure). And do you think that that God won't take care of you? The pagans don't believe that; they run after everything they think they need to make life secure (that's what the pagan-acting Israelites did, too). But you (all of us) need to seek God's Kingdom and righteousness first – and he'll give you all you need.

When I'm tempted to worry about the future – my or my husband's health, financial or family matters, whatever – and when I catch myself getting bogged down in trying to control my life myself, spring comes along with its reappearance of the birds and re-emergence of the lilies. It's a gracious reminder that God has always deeply loved and cared for, and is still loving and shepherding us, and all of his creation, including me. "Ask the LORD for rain in the springtime," he says (and for whatever metaphorical "rain" you need); "it is the LORD who makes the storm clouds. He gives showers of rain to men, and plants of the field to everyone" (Zech. 10:1).

Marian Van Til worked for Christian Courier from 1984-2000, and preceded Harry der Nederlanden as its editor. She now lives in Youngstown, NY. She may be contacted by email at: mvantil@adelphia.net or via her website: www.wordpowerpublishing.com



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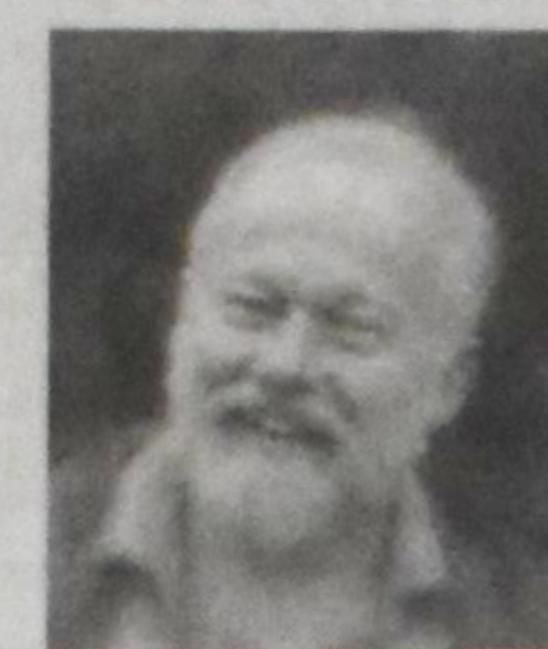
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Dordt College

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Dordt College invites applications and nominations for the position of **Provost**. Dordt College seeks to provide a holistic learning experience for our students, in which the kingdom perspective is infused throughout the curriculum – a curriculum designed to help students develop Christian insight to discern and challenge the worldviews of our age in light of God's Word and a reformational perspective. The Provost is responsible to the President for giving administrative leadership to the integration of academic affairs and student services in a coordinated curricular and co-curricular effort program.

A doctorate degree is required with experience desired in academic administration, faculty development, mentoring and management. A review of applications received will begin immediately, and will continue until the position is filled. Qualified and interested applicants should send their curriculum vitae, letter of interest, transcripts, reference letters and contact information for 3-5 people, and a personal faith statement discussing the candidate's religious convictions, understanding of Christian higher education, philosophy for academic affairs administration, and how all of these components relate to the mission of Dordt College.

Review of applications will begin immediately and continue until the position is filled. We are looking at a start date of no later than August 1, 2008. Information should be sent to:

Provost Search Committee

– Attn: Sue Droog, Human Resources

Dordt College, 498 Fourth Ave. NE, Sioux Center, IA 51250

Phone: (712) 722-6011 Fax: (712) 722-1198

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Events/Advertising

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Apr 27, 28 Cambridge Christian School 40th anniversary. Call Nick at 519-620-8650 or website www.cambridgechristianschool.com See ad this issue for more details.

May 19, 20 Georgetown CRC 50th anniversary celebrations. Details to follow in April 30th issue or email: info@gcrc.on.ca. Website: www.gcrc.on.ca

May 4 Liberation Day celebration, Maranatha CRC, Cambridge. See page 22 for details.

May 5 Retirement celebration for Clarence Bos, Principal of Clinton and District Christian School. He is retiring from his career in education at the end of the 2006/07 school year. Social begins at 7:30 pm and a tribute begins at 8:00 pm. Participate in the tribute by calling Ann Reinink at 519.523.4806 or email cdfs@tcc.on.ca See www.clintonchristian.ca/retirement for information.

May 26 Laurentian Hills Christian School 40th anniversary, 11 Laurentian Dr, Kitchener, ON Dinner, program, \$15/person. To reserve by May 1st., call Mrs Grift 519-576-6700 or Mrs. Olthoff 519-742-5152. Check the web site for more details at www.lhcs.ws

May 28- June 1 "A Vacation with a Christian Perspective" - The annual Milk & Honey Summer Festival at Redeemer University College will be held **May 28 - June 1, 2007**. This unique vacation offers a week of relaxation as well as cultural and spiritual stimulation. Highlights include guided tours, banquets, informative lectures, fellowship and entertainment. Join Dr Bert Polman and Professor Ray Louter as they explore the theme "Psalms of Lament and Psalms of Rejoicing." For more information or to register, call 905-648-2139 ext. 4521.

June 9, 10 The First Christian Reformed Church of Kemptville 50 year celebration. Banquet on June 9 and worship service on June 10. Contact Harmen Boersma (613-258-5565).



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performances were played, all sold out.

Beppe Tryntsje shows what it means to grow old: the confrontation with contemporary society, the ailments of old age and the mind constantly sliding back to the past. Family trees and old pictures are passing by. The past comes to life again.



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Check the web site for more details at www.lhcs.ws

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News

Sweeping South America: indigenous pride

Sara Miller Llana

LIMA, PERU – Hilaria Supa stands out in Lima in her brightly hued ancestral clothes and long braids. But she is even more of an iconoclast in the Peruvian legislature, where the congresswoman insists on speaking in her native Quechua.

In doing so, Ms. Supa says, she hopes to create a new era of inclusion for the indigenous who have long been discriminated against in Peru.

"When we speak in Quechua they say it's rude because they don't understand us," she says. "But my hope is that the language will someday be appreciated; it will be difficult, but not impossible."

Across the Andes, similar efforts – some controversial – are bringing new recognition to indigenous culture. In Bolivia, the government hopes to nearly double the number of native language programs in classrooms by next year. In Peru, foreigners and locals alike are enrolling in extracurricular courses. Internationally, the renaissance is getting a boost as well: this past summer Google launched a new page in Quechua and Microsoft unveiled Quechua translations of Windows.

It coincides with the indigenous rights movement that has swept across Latin America – contributing to the presidential win of Evo Morales in Bolivia, the competitive run of Ollanta Humala in Peru, and the recently announced presidential bid of Rigoberta Menchu in Guatemala. Each has given a nod to indigenous culture and language in classrooms and the halls of government.

"At a grassroots level, indigenous groups are trying to revitalize their identity, their language, culture, and their ideas," says Serafin Coronel-Molina, a linguist at Princeton University in New Jersey, and native Quechua speaker.

There are an estimated 10 to 13 million Quechua speakers in South America, most of them in Peru and Bolivia. Bolivia has an estimated 1.5 million Aymara speakers. Andean languages also flourish in Ecuador as well as parts of Colombia and Argentina.

But for years, native languages were seen as a sign of inferiority. Miriam Cayetano, who teaches Quechua at San Andres University in La Paz, Bolivia, says parents used to forbid their children to speak their mother tongue. "Before parents thought their children would be undervalued [and discriminated against]," she says.

Now enrollment in classes teaching



Bolivia indigenous into the mainstream

indigenous tongues is rising in universities and private institutions. Concepción Quisbert, a student of Aymara at San Andres University, joins some 250 students enrolled in either Aymara or Quechua. On a recent day, students pulled out their Aymara dictionaries, while their professor holds up erasers and pencils. The students are learning to say words like 'phuyu,' which means 'pen'. The room is packed.

"I understand Aymara because I spoke it with my parents, but never learned how to write it," says Ms. Quisbert. "I want to know my culture, and my country."

Most in Bolivia cite the rise of President Morales, an Aymara Indian and the nation's first indigenous president, for a boost in native languages.

But in Peru enthusiasm is also on the rise. On a recent evening in Cusco, the ancient capital of the Inca empire, a group of students enrolled in intermediary Quechua at the Center of Regional Andean Studies Bartolome de las Casas practice communicating. They are anthropologists, teachers in rural areas, and university students studying for careers such as medicine.

Sonia Louiza grew up speaking Quechua but gave it up when she began elementary school. "I was embarrassed, and thought speaking it was something horrible," she says. She enrolled in an intermediate class to recapture what she lost. "It helps me to know who I am."

But while many embrace native languages, others resist their roots. Amparo Garcia, the director for Spanish and Quechua programs at Acupari Language School in Cusco, says that most of her Quechua students are foreigners. "There is a certain resistance to Quechua among some Peruvians," she says. "Even if they know Quechua, sometimes when they are addressed in it they answer in Spanish, or English."

That is why Supa has made it one of her battle cries. Seventeen percent of Peru's residents speak Quechua as a first

language. In her home Huallacocha, outside Cusco, residents address one another in Quechua on the streets and in local stores. Some don't speak Spanish at all. But it is a different story along the coast, where most of the political and economic power lies. In July, Supa made headlines when she swore her oath of office not on the Bible

but in the name of Incan deities. She is also working on a law to introduce indigenous language education to public schools. "If we don't have an identity, then the rest won't value us," Supa says.

"The town is so proud of her," says Carlos Huaman, Supa's cousin and a farmer in Huallacocha, where homes are made with mud and straw, and the streets turn into mud slicks in the rainy season. "She can help the indigenous."

Not everyone has celebrated giving more space to indigenous culture. Last year in Bolivia, plans to replace Roman Catholic education in public schools with a course that would place more emphasis on indigenous faith, as well as to require that all schools teach native languages, was scrapped after citizens balked – despite the fact that well over half of the population speaks a native language, according to the national census.

But the Bolivian Education Ministry is pushing to nearly double its native language programs to some 5,000 schools. Currently 2,830 have such programs, up from 540 in 1990. "Learning our culture helps us de-colonize mentally," says Adrian Montalvo, who helps plan the native languages program in the Education Ministry.

The goal is to have all functionaries at the national level adept at at least one native language, too. Where many in the younger generations focus on foreign languages for social mobility and work opportunities, Ms. Cayetano, says many students are enrolling in native languages today for the very same reasons.

"They are starting to revalue their languages," says Cayetano, whose department offers classes to functionaries in the municipal government of La Paz. "They are going to need it in the future."

Sara Miller Llana is a staff writer for The Christian Science Monitor

News briefs

Garlic – good for what ails you?

A 1.5 million dollar government-funded study concludes that garlic is highly overrated as a help in reducing cholesterol levels. It worked in rats and mice, but not in human beings.

In the neighborhood where I grew up, with a large Ukrainian population, garlic was deemed good for whatever ails you. Of course, most Ukrainians consumed a lot of their garlic in kielbasa, a fatty sausage that probably countered most of the benefits of the garlic.

In the study, participants were fed garlic sandwiches. They should have served it in that famous Dutch dish – hutzpah. I'm positive that would have doubled its effectiveness. Especially if you add lots of beans to the carrots.

Garlic does have many other benefits, however. It will almost certainly get you more room on a crowded bus. That reduces stress. Less stress, better health.

Scientists don't always take all factors into account.

Wisdom in sleep

Here's another study on sleep. There have been numerous sleep studies lately – maybe because it's so easy to get volunteers.

A Harvard study suggests that while we're sleeping our minds order and categorize our memories. "We're not just stabilizing memories during sleep," says Bob Stickgold from Harvard Medical School. "We're extracting the meaning."

Researchers found that people were better able to recall lists of related words after a night's sleep than after the same time spent awake during the day. They also found it easier to recollect themes that the words had in common – forgetting around 25 per cent more themes after a waking rest.

So, teachers, if you spot a student dozing off in class, please do not disturb: he is simply processing and reordering all the information you've fed him. When he awakes, you'll have a wiser student.

Generosity in older people

According to a recent poll, older people (over 65) are more generous than the young. They tend to give more, especially when there are disasters, but also to religious organizations.

Is that out of generosity, do you think? Or do older people go to church more – and as they approach the end of life are they perhaps trying to store up good works against the day when they will have to give account?

There may be a less cynical explanation. Perhaps they simply forget that they've already donated, and end up giving more than once.

Then, too, the poll appeared in a magazine targeting the elderly. Maybe it was slanted to shake loose donations by means of flattery.